



ARGUS

2016

40TH ANNIVERSARY

MASQUERADE

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THE STORY OF ARGUS

According to Greek mythology, Argus was a giant with one hundred eyes. While some of his eyes "slept," he kept watch with the others. Hermes lulled Argus to sleep with his magic lyre and slew him with a stone. Upon finding the dead Argus, Hera, queen of the Gods, placed his eyes in the tail of a peacock. The cover of Argus traditionally represents this ancient legend handed down to us by the Greeks. The title was chosen to represent the different views and opinions of readers as though each perspective were an eye of the peacock.

ARGUS EDITORIAL STAFF

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Dr. Julie Kane	Faculty Advisor
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Argus staff would like to extend a warm thanks to our judges this year: Ms. Mary Louise Porter (Art), Mr. Charles Ward (Photography), Dr. Emily Allen (Poetry), and Dr. Joseph Briseño (Prose). They chose well, and their efforts are greatly appreciated.

We would also like to make a special acknowledgment of our advisor, Dr. Julie Kane. Dr. Kane has worked with Argus for fourteen years. In her tenure she has encouraged the growth of young artists and writers to express themselves. Many students have been taught and mentored by Dr. Kane. Sadly, this will be her last year at NSU, as well as with Argus. We are grateful for all she has done for Argus. We wish her every happiness in her retirement.

EDITOR'S NOTES

On the 40th Anniversary—

40 years ago, Argus made a successful debut as Northwestern State University's first literary and art magazine. The founders of Argus sought to showcase and encourage the incredible talents of the student body. For four decades Argus has effectively represented the creative spirit of our campus.

The Argus office is like a time capsule. There is a secret history there. The previous editions of this publication that are found on the dusty shelves of office 316G provide us with the clearest view of what Northwestern students have truly cared about over the years. Take a look at the archives online. You will see what I am talking about. What were the students forty years ago interested in? What were they making cartoons of? Whose profiles were they sketching? What was funny or scandalous to them?

Coping with loss, the whirlwind of love, finding oneself—these are the themes that connect our generations. They can be found in every issue of Argus that has been published throughout the decades. Argus reflects the diversity in perception that simultaneously connects us and makes us unique.

On Masquerade—

A mask is as deceitful or as honest as the person beneath it wants to be. A mask, like a poem or a story, is either seeking to expose some truth or deny it. An artists' masquerade is an intriguing concept. Imagine, visionaries unrestrained, released from any sense of propriety, station, or obligation, creating honest art.

On the Editorial Team—

I know with absolute certainty that this issue would not have been possible without my staff. The Argus editors are all hardworking, dedicated artists, who have put so many extra hours into making this edition the best.

Careful deliberation went into choosing which pieces were included in this year's edition. I hope that you enjoy discovering the art within these pages as much as I have.

Maggie Harris

CONTEST WINNERS

Poetry:

1st place - Writing Prompt / Meredith Prochaska

2nd place - Hurricane Season / Delores Atkins

3rd place - Face Yourself / Heather Mathis

Honorable Mention - I Was Scared Once / Crista Cagney

Prose:

1st place - Purgatory of the Devout / Shundrika Smith

2nd place - A Time I Knew You Differently / Charles Mac Hamilton

3rd place - 418 Slack Street / Madelyn Bryan

Honorable Mention - Pardon My Accent / Ricardo Ventura

Photography:

1st place - Cold Print / Jessica Cross

2nd place - For Celie / Caitlin O'Neal

3rd place - Still Life / Leslie Criswell

Editor's Choice - Earth and Sky / Heather Mathis

Fine Arts:

1st place - Restored Hope / Leslie Criswell

2nd place - An Aged Face / John Campbell

3rd place - Above Adelboden / Marie Robichaux

Editor's Choice - Perspective / Caitlin O'Neal

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Poetry:	1	
Life: A Symphony	2	Ashleigh Daniels
Instructions Not Included	3	Nicolas Fry
Hurricane Season	4	Delores Atkins
First Fight/ Last Night : A Ghazal	7	Meredith Prochaska
Highway	8	Crista Cagney
I'm Not White	10	Katie Rayburn
Speak	11	Jennifer Peedin
Language	12	Meg Denny
Trials	15	Meredith Prochaska
Pageant Queen	16	Delores Atkins
Speech Impediment	18	Shundrika Smith
You People	19	James Lewis Huss
Writing Prompt	20	Meredith Prochaska
DIET	22	Nicholas Jones
Adolescence	23	Aaron Rogers
One Day	24	James Lewis Huss
Twenty-One Seas	26	Matthew Mims
Our Battle Cry	27	Jennifer Peedin
René, Aghast	28	Charles Mac Hamilton
A Shipwreck in a Bottle	31	Markus Templeton
I'll Never Forget	32	Ashleigh Daniels
Art	33	James Lewis Huss
Poetically Aroused	34	Delores Atkins
Butterbeer Frappuccino	36	Shundrika Smith
Ultimate Surrender	37	Katie Rayburn
Confessions	38	Amber Martin
Arise, Saturn, Arise	42	Heather Mathis
Face Yourself	43	Heather Mathis

Oscillation	44	Crista Cagney
Unity	46	Matthew Mims
Chill	47	Stephanie Yates
I Lag Far Behind You	48	Charles Mac Hamilton
I Was Scared Once	50	Crista Cagney
Farcical Epic	53	Hayden Ellender
Everything I Find Beautiful in Her	64	Rachel Lavergne
The Beehive Behaves Strangely	66	Charles Mac Hamilton
Daveed	68	Crista Cagney
In Defense of the Stage	69	Kelia Rowan
I Don't Need It	70	Alecia Alford
Nail-Biter	70	Ashleigh Daniels
Life	72	James Lewis Huss
Measure, Weigh, Decide	73	Alecia Alford
The Ugly	74	Jennifer Peedin
I Live Here and You Live There	76	Jennifer Peedin
Telegram of Sincere Regret	77	Katie Rayburn
Safe "Pass"age	78	Airrol Angelle
Death Parade, an Elegy for Me	80	Stephanie Allen
Meditations on Poetry	81	James Lewis Huss
Sanctuary	82	Alecia Alford
Needs of the People	83	Katie Rayburn
Dream/catch/er	84	Matthew Mims
No Heroes Allowed	86	Dakota Newman
Fireball	87	Shundrika Smith
Save Face	88	Maggie Harris
Contacts	90	Katie Rayburn
Happy Valentine's Day	91	Nicholas Jones
Dreams	92	Nicholas Jones
Mixed Media Being	94	Dakota Newman
Daydreamer, You Left Your Body in Calculus Class	95	Meg Denny

Devil Robed in White	96	Dakota Newman
Jonathan	98	Meg Denny
Thoughts From Your Privileged Girlfriend	100	Meg Denny
Bound	102	Jacqueline Jordan
Happy	103	Shundrika Smith

Prose: 104

418 Slack Street	105	Madelyn Bryan
Summer Haze	108	Raley Pellittieri
Pardon My Accent	113	Ricardo Ventura
Purgatory of the Devout	116	Shundrika Smith
A Time I Knew You Differently	118	Charles Mac Hamilton
A Brief Existence	121	Nicolas Fry

Fine Arts/Photography: 54

Earth and Sky	55	Heather Matthis
Perspective	56	Caitlin O'Neal
Still Life	57	Leslie Criswell
Above Adelboden	58	Marie Robichaux
An Aged Face	59	John Campbell
For Celie	60	Caitlin O'Neal
Cold Print	61	Jessica Cross
Restored Hope	62	Leslie Criswell

Bonus Art Pieces:

Crying Mother	6	John Campbell
Hide	23	Dustin Cormier
Face Value	25	Mackenzie Johnson
Sweeney Todd	45	Jessica Cross
Life Upside Down	79	Amy Poole
Antiquity After Modernity II	97	Ethan Hay





POETRY

LIFE: A SYMPHONY

ASHLEIGH DANIELS

Movement 1: Lullaby

Pianissimo, the strings softly play.

Largo, the melody calm and gentle.

Dolce, the sweet love of a child.

Andante, first steps taken.

Movement 2: Growing up

Allegro, time moves faster.

Festivamente, an inescapable circus.

A capella, alone or so it seems.

Presto, it won't slow down.

Movement 3: The End

Rallentando, time begins to infinitely stretch.

Dolente, there's such a thing as suffering.

Con desiderio, longing for the past.

Zeffiroso, gone like a breeze.

INSTRUCTIONS NOT INCLUDED

NICOLAS FRY

I was told so long ago that I had a talent
That somehow words could make me appear so gallant
I was lauded by all those who saw me write
And every time my fingers hit a keyboard it felt so right
But someone forgot to mention a few things
No one told me the strange pain that syntax brings
All those stories I created all on my own
Who knew they'd make me feel all alone
Could someone have told me I'd fall into despair?
That I'd turn cynical because I saw my desires as unfair?
Somehow I figured I'd matter for my use of English
I'd be showered in adoration, validation, and feel distinguished
But life doesn't stop when you write for eight hours
No one said people would scoff at creative writing powers
I wasn't informed that I'd be met with so much disbelief
That'd I'd lie and say
I'll teach just to avoid all the grief
What of my future books that may never be read?
Will I only gain predominance after I'm dead?
Why did no one mention that eventually I'd feel like God?
Here's the ironic twist,
I don't believe in god, isn't that odd?
Did anyone think to tell me
I'd fall in love with a cigarette?
Add it to a laptop or a tablet and coffee and I'll be set
But I guess it can't be as bad as it seems
Because nothing else matters
so long as I'm chasing my dreams.

2ND PLACE

HURRICANE SEASON

DELORES ATKINS

Dear love.

I let you do it to me again.

Tattoo your lips on my spinal cord in Chinese so I wouldn't understand you.

Let you penetrate my inner being with your false promises of security.

You promised I'd be safe here.

That you would brave these broken levees with your arms wide open.

Hold me tightly when the winds want to rip me apart.

I gave you my storm surge.

Murky water filled with bacteria rich enough to grow a forest.

And you smiled with joy at constant currents.

How my tides swelled at the echoes of your hurricanes

And I basked in the embrace of your tropical depressions.

Hoping they were teases of what really goes on in your mind.

I waited for you to tell me it was all just hurricane season.

That before I could close my eyes you would be over with.

And you convinced me to laugh at my doubts.

That I was simply over-exaggerating your absence because you were in fact real.

Nature's forever kiss on a land that knows spices and slurs goes hand in hand.

Who would want the safety of boarded-up windows when the fun is in chasing the storm?

So I flung open my gates and let the water flow.

Like Katrina was just a waterfall and I was Niagara.

Like this Rita was just the second child and I was the bastard.

Born out of the illegitimate love affair my mind had with my heart

To determine that some days my smile can't be in place like you want it to be.

I told you I was broken before you pursued me.

Caught me by my wrist and convinced me

That hurricane season was nothing we couldn't handle with the doors wide open.

I guess you, love, never knew how to stay safe in the confines of my heart.

And I understand now.

My heart was never seen as a home.

But more like a cage.

Metal bars to entrap you.

Keep you as close as I dare with no way for you to leave me.

Why do you want to leave?

Isn't this what you wanted?

To be consumed in my typhoons

Like a storm chaser getting too close to move away from me.

Because you love me.

Don't you?



FIRST FIGHT/ LAST NIGHT: A GHAZAL

MEREDITH PROCHASKA

remember our trip to the sea, Love?
you said we were meant to be, Love.

that was back in the beginning, when we didn't fight.
now our flaws are the only things you see, Love.

remember when we were a dream, moonlit laughs,
cheesy grins, a wild incandescent reverie, Love?

where did we go? how did we ruin this?
what happened to you and me, Love?

the sea swallowed up the girl you fell in love with.
why won't you just let me be free, Love?

HIGHWAY

CRISTA CAGNEY

I passed through the valley of Elysian Fields today.

It's not what I expected.

It was raining. No, not the pretty sprinkle dew drops of diamond tears that you catch on your ebony eyelashes, but the shit that seeps into your bones and freezes your soul.

I passed a heap of matted and tattered shag and realized, to my horror, it was a dog. It was mangled and bent in impossible angles to be alive. But there it sat, waiting for its lost master, its tail wagging faintly in the breeze, its mulberry tongue lolling out of its pucid jaw.

I gagged.

The valley itself was drenched in gloom. Orbs of iridescent eyes hovered above frozen black rivers, and the beasts that looked through them were wretched. They growled and coughed in guttural haws, maneuvering ever so slowly along the riverbeds.

It was horrid.

The valley's grass was brown and damp, weighed down by the overhang of the shitty mist. Wayward beasts, some extremely large, lay on their sides with mud as black and thick as tar caked on their skyward sides. They looked as if they purposely rolled into the soil, upturning it. Revealing the underlying darkness of the valley, if not for the obstreperous groans they would emit every so often, as they

would wriggle forth. From afar, the squirming beasts looked like squirming maggots, their silver coats refracting what little light the mist provided from within the clouds.

I felt sorry for them.

That they were stuck in permanent torture whereas I could move on, free of that despair, and go where I need to be, albeit, not as soon as I would have liked it to be because of them, but still there. But that is not why I felt sorry for them.

Because.

That shitty rain was so fucking cold

And that dog was never going to find its master.

At least the mud looked kind of fun.

I'M NOT WHITE

KATIE RAYBURN

Do you think yourself
Better than me?
Don't undermine my achievements
By putting a color by my name.
Don't analyze me and my past
By using skin tone as my "struggle."
It's funny though, ain't it,
That we have this preconception
Of a person from a written voice
That we supply in our heads.
This voice constructed
By the world controlling us,
While we attempt to control it.
If you thought I was Black,
If you saw this as a scream for
Injustice, racism, and inequality,
Well then you're half right,
But you've completely missed the point.

SPEAK

JENNIFER PEEDIN

Speak with your eyes open and glaring, crinkling from laughter
 even

Speak waving your arms, pointing your fingers, bending your
 back

Speak to me with a mouth open and shouting

Speak in laughter, in tongues, in mumbles, in anything

Please speak so I can understand, comprehend, and grasp

Speak through gestures and smiles, over coffee cups and
 through the classroom door

Speak so there is meaning

Speak I beg you to speak

Speak and say something, anything, anyhow, in almost anyway
 you please

Speak either in frustration or giggles

Speak with a voice so strong

Speak to fill my every bone and fiber

Speak and say what you must

But if you speak you must not, you cannot, whisper.

LANGUAGE

MEG DENNY

My granddaughter spoke to everyone but me. I remember her gradual growing up as a blur, a series of events in which I was not particularly included nor purposefully excluded from. She kept me close enough to feel like an audience member in the front row of her movie; I could never interfere, but I was engaged enough to feel like she had tried to keep me around.

My granddaughter spoke to everyone but me, and somehow managed to form a relationship with me anyway. She kept me in a designated space when visiting my home. I would wait patiently in my chair as she visited with her grandmother, mother, and extra family members; had I gotten up to join, she would have fled to an empty room in my house full of vacancy. I remained in my chair, my assigned space, and waited for her boredom to sink in.

My granddaughter seldom spoke with me, but often put on a show as a substitute for our language. She would grow tired of the family shenanigans in the kitchen, glance my way (I always watched TV to pass the time), and slowly glide towards the shelf of books and trinkets next to my chair. Each item on the shelf made her eyes form a new expression. She stroked the glass statues of animals, cupped the Washi eggs in her hands, and ran her finger down the pages of closed books.

My granddaughter would rarely offer me her voice, but danced around to say hello. I remember her complete avoidance of eye contact as she chose an item from the shelf, and began to move around the living room. The voices of the kitchen would blend together with the noise from the TV, and she utilized their combined rhythm as her partner.

She twirled slowly, absent-mindedly, often looking at the ceiling or ground; she never left the space in front of my chair. Eventually, she would lull herself to sleep and creep her way to the carpet floor. She would close her eyes and let go of her chosen object, and only wake up when it was time to leave.

My granddaughter spoke to everyone but me, and this got worse after she was not six years old anymore. I had a stroke, and could no longer speak much myself. At least, I was told no one understood me. She grew frightened of me—she distanced our space more often. I remember feeling like it was not on purpose. The jokes I tried to tell her made her take a step backwards every time. I would begin them, end them, and she would only respond with a nod and more distance.

My granddaughter never talked to me, and I realized how careful she made herself, not to take up too much space, not to look at me for too long, not to speak up. I did not know what to do. I did not know how to open up our silent communication again. What barriers could I break down for us when she was a child and I was incapable of holding even a hammer?

My granddaughter rarely spoke with me, but began to offer me looks when she turned thirteen. Anytime she came to visit, she shared with me a raising of eyebrows, a gaze of "how ridiculous is our family," an eyes-locked moment that meant to say, "I get it; I'm sorry we cannot say more." Of course, she did not "get it" at thirteen, but she tried.

My granddaughter often only used her eyes to exchange words with me, but tried to mend our connection further with favors. From this age to the end, she became in charge of my walker. After a drive, it would be her waiting with a hand, and the unfolded walker next to the passenger seat door. The moments between my sitting down and standing up were the only times she did not try to meet eyes with me.

These looks had evolved into sarcastic smirks and trading of thoughts like “Well, here we are again; I’m still a mess from the stroke, and you’re still as timid as ever.” Her eyes sometimes said to me, “Isn’t this hilarious bullshit?” Though that was a look I got only at church.

My granddaughter often communicated with me through expressions, but I remember the last time she had too many fears to say anything with her face. From the hospital bed, my eyes reached to catch hers. I thought, look at me, I have something funny to offer before. Look at me, I want to tell you that this room has the dumbest colors I’ve ever seen. How pleasant, I wanted to remark. But my wife interrupted me asking if I wanted to pray. I rolled my eyes, and my granddaughter sat down next to me, refusing to look anywhere but out the tiny window.

My granddaughter and I had our own language outside of words, and the last thing I remember is her hand grabbing mine, trying to explain through this action that she just couldn’t give her eyes to me anymore.

TRIALS

MEREDITH PROCHASKA

this is the aftermath,
the sequel no one wants to watch.
we are left with the repercussions of our wildness—
the consequences of our youth—
and I feel so far away from myself,
i've forgotten how alive I used to be,
eighteen & wild & free.
we have lost our spontaneity,
our excitement diminished to nothing
but the lingering smoke in our lungs,
our newfound sense of responsibility.

PAGEANT QUEEN

DELORES ATKINS

I will never be pageant queen.
Hair perfectly in place from four hours in the mirror.
Never be makeup heavy smile flawless in bright lights and lashes
long enough to kiss my cheeks.
I will never be pretty princess.
Crown always seated straight.
Poised. Hands soft as clouds.
More concerned with chipped nails than anything else.
Clocking my nail technician's work in weekly.
Watching my weight like astrologists analyze an eclipse.
Always with the latest in fashion
dressed to kill.
To seduce.
To appeal to the male senses by being the ideal woman.
I will never be prom queen
happy in dresses that flow endlessly.
Never frightened a getting too sweaty in gym class
Worried about presentation and perspiration not about failing to run
a mile.
Never be the one that stands as an idol of womanhood.
Never be happy homemaker Susan waiting on the sidelines of
soccer games with a smile and a snack pack.
But I will be scraped knees after recess.
Kickball in the rain with the boys because I'm the best pitcher.
Slider in home plate safe because I took my lead early.
I be the first person in line to see the new Star Wars movie with the
biggest smile on my face.
I be the last one out the theater because everyone knows the best
stuff is shown after the credits roll.

I be naming anime like I was born in Japan.
 Yu Yu Hakusho
 Samurai Champloo
 Kill la Kill
 Code Geass
 Naruto
 I will be the girl who knows more about Dragon Ball Z than you do.
 The girl who's not afraid to bust your ass on Call of Duty.
 I be the main one coming off of the field dirty.
 Forehead glistening with sweat like I was born to shine.
 Born to be different
 Born for some men to just not get it
 Born to believe my body is the last thing anyone should draw
 attention to.
 Being woman never looked so dominant.
 Never looked so defiant of pretty
 so hard working
 so black
 so Afro conscious
 so tomboys in pin suits
 Never looked so me.
 Black girl labeled for being more than a pretty face and a skirt
 Marked as unattractive because my brand of fun doesn't come with
 a designer tag attached.
 Sometimes I step back and ask myself
 Is there something wrong with you?
 The response: fuck no.
 I'm a woman.
 We're made to be complicated.

SPEECH IMPEDIMENT

SHUNDRIKA SMITH

They do not listen as I speak
loudly, pleading, desperately
trying to be a part of the group
as they walk along proudly, t
riumphantly shouting as I walk
two steps behind,
pushed to the side
overlooked.

They do not see me as I speak
normally, cool, unaffected
by their inattention to me
as they joke and jive blindly,
disregarding of the outside world
which strangles me slowly.

They do not speak as I speak
softly, unassuming, forgotten
deep within the jagged shards of my mind,
I whisper my speech
alone, bleeding, broken, dying.

YOU PEOPLE

JAMES LEWIS HUSS

You People should pull yourselves up by the bootstraps;
So what if your parents and their parents were poor?

You People should go back to your own country;
This nation was founded by foreign white men.

You People should get right with Jesus Christ,
Unless of course He's Catholic or Mormon.

You People should just get over that flag;
It's the cherished heritage of my racist friends.

You People should really stop trying to wed
And be happy you're not getting stoned to death.

You People should not seek the same benefits;
Our Lord in Eden made you helpmeet to men.

You People should leave my God, my Guns, my Flag,
My Fear, my Hate, my Ignorance alone.

1ST PLACE

WRITING PROMPT

MEREDITH PROCHASKA

write about the day when you were four,
when the sky was black and purple and streaked with white light,
as the storm came through over the barren cornfield,
and the geese flew away in fear.

write about the way your mother called to you,
begging you to come home, to come back,
and how it is just the same as now,
as she calls you to come home, to come back,
because the future scares her
but you are just too far in the distance to care about her cries
as they blur into the screeches of the frightened birds.

write about the day you almost drowned, seven years old,
not scared of anything, including the water you could barely swim in.
write about the way the sun glistened over the blue blue water
while you let yourself be engulfed in the beauty
and how you still weren't scared,
you still weren't worried about dying
and you almost wished they didn't see you,
didn't pull you to the concrete safety of land outside the pool
because you wanted to feel that kind of light.

write about the moment he said he loved you,
in the pitch black dark of your car in his driveway,

and he waited with shaky hands, shaky heart,
to hear those words repeated back.
write about the way your hands found his
as you repeated those words and
write about the kiss of a lifetime just after they left your lips.
write about the weight of fearlessness.
write about the car crash two years ago
where you screamed oh god oh god
because there was nothing left to say,
and you finally knew fear because think of your mother
think of her grief. think of the boy you will no longer get to love.
write about the way your head hit the airbag as the car hit the railing
and how good being scared felt when it was over,
when adrenaline filled you,
and fear was the thing that kept you alive.

DIEt

NICHOLAS JONES 17.NOVEMBER.2015

It's all a charade,
Maniacally and methodically manipulating your mind,
Words spoken to make you doubt yourself,
When self-love is hard to find,

It breaks my heart when my niece turns on her TV,
Only to look up and see frailty,
The same model gloating,
"Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels,"

Well,
Will the pain we feel,
After she has died,
Taste as good as the food she was afraid to try,
Or will it rot inside her stomach,
Whilst the coroner is trying to decide,
Whether or not she's as fuckable
As the last one that was carted in,
At the ripe old age of 25,

They say real beauty resides within,
And that is true,
But it's hard to stay alive,
When we're all told that being beautiful
Means you have to die.

ADOLESCENCE

AARON ROGERS

I remember
I know adolescence
Love, hurt, tears, Joy

I remember the fields
Corn and Wheat
Concrete

That back alley;
Fear, excitement, guilt
The first touch of a Man,
The rape of my innocence.



ONE DAY

JAMES LEWIS HUSS

Birds sing the sun's dawn,
The waking blades smooch
the dew,
And I think of you.

Mists rise through the air,
Heat of day hints its approach,
But you will not come.

The halcyon sky,
The wanton breeze, quiet trees,
And my empty bed.

A rabbit chews grass,
A bumblebee loots nectar,
I breakfast alone.

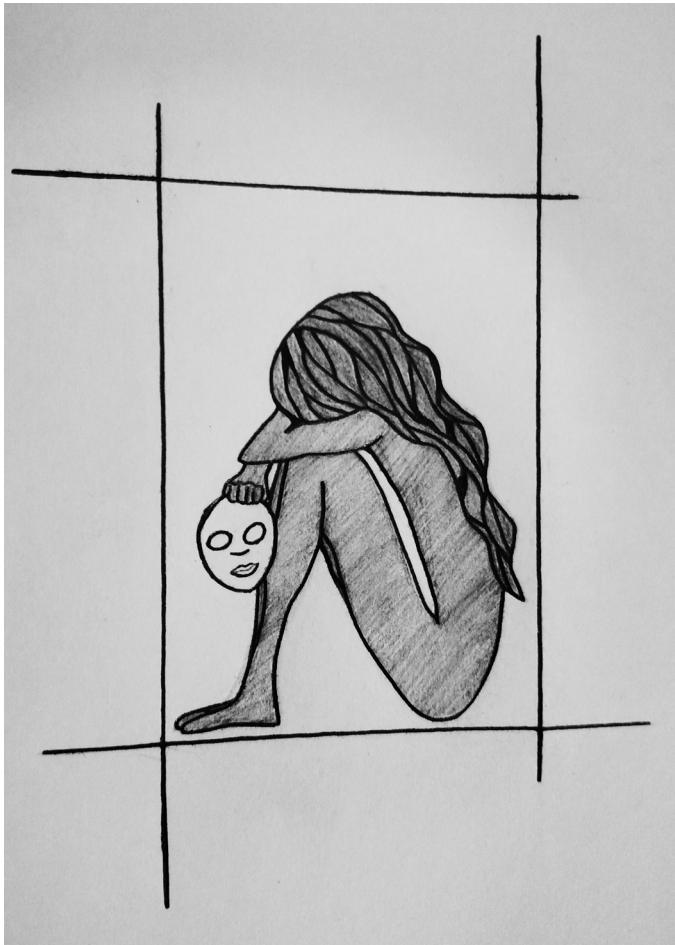
The smell of cut sod
Mingles with fresh coffee ground
For a single cup.

The sun glares brightly,
The humidity stifles,
The solitude burns.

The streets come alive,
People jostle here and there,
I'm still without you.

The afternoon wanes,
Sun and moon change place again,
My mind's eye grows tired.

Stars command the sky,
Crickets chirp most restlessly,
But you never came.



TWENTY-ONE SEAS

MATTHEW MIMS

Your rhinestone eyes are like factories in the distance.
Immortal portals to our children's future that shut only when Hypnos
goes about his business.
My heart waves in knots and coasts for a beacon.
Nautical remedies leave me senseless.
Nonetheless I find my way to you only by sheer will and intuition.
My starship, take me up and don't be late.
Let's rendezvous where the lighthouse kisses the moon and swoons
its eyes across the bay.
Twenty-one to the day, Live a pirate's life I pray we may.
Map out the treasures of your chest in one month but a lifetime
awaits;
Thought I was lost at sea but the ocean is your face.

OUR BATTLE CRY

JENNIFER PEEDIN

Our tents flap and snap in the wind. I breathe in deep and say it's a perfect evening for a battle. Voices on the wind whipping through camp sound like lullabies we used to know. Swords lower and we see our mother's faces. The wind picks up, frantic to begin, and we grow excited. Shake off the songs and soft memories. We dip our fingers into the charcoal and paint our faces. I smudge black circles with sharp edges around my eyes. Now we are ready. Now we can march into the woods like beasts from fairytales. My crown is too big and heavy. The queens in books wear gold, but I wear stone. I stand in front of my mirror to watch it slip down again. My mirror is cracked, but it still shows the monster there. She has a Cheshire grin. It's dark now and I hear them cry it's time to begin! I walk out of my tent to lead and the monster follows. Sound the battle cry, I scream. Run from the fire. Run from the darkness. We are the children with the charcoal faces. Louder! Run, run from the fire. Run, children, run. The darkness is coming. Then we go dancing off into the woods with the monsters.

RENÉ, AGHAST

CHARLES MAC HAMILTON

Cogito.

Therefore I cut to the chase.
And call it when I hear it.
I am a Bishop of Bullshit. I have written
many chapters in its book.
I know trained seals when I see them.
If God is not the author of confusion,
then who wrote His Word?
Salient? Perhaps.
For those who came before me.
Go, therefore. And be the message,
to those who purvey entertainment
as art and thought.
How can "true art" exist
without an authoritative voice?

There is always another epistemology,
channel or site. And I want to know
what else is on.
Too much information
without proper instruction
breeds misunderstanding,
not clarity. And ignorance and conceit
will become society's burden.
But now it is a cowardly new world.
A succulent but poisoned apple.
As for wisdom,
the reputation will be there—
without the reality—and a recipe
for recollection, not memory.

I suppose only the Simulacrum
is true, in Plato's cave.
Medium is message
and user is content.
The lying words of the Media
implant on the brain,
and prevent men from speaking
to one another.

Through my digitized narcosis,
I am enslaved
to my own image.
And I can say anything
I want to you. I can throw stones
at a safe distance, and show
empathy at a long arm's reach,
when crafting the perfect
digital response.
The eyes and ears of the street
decayed, when the machine
became God. The eye in the sky,
a super-snooper's dream.
And Intellectual Capital
at one's fingertips.

Communication establishes uniformity
by isolating character and
magnifying talent. No transactional ties
to purport. Identical menus
at different price levels.
Privatized, customized worlds
of stick-figures expressing

themselves, "My Son After the Dentist."
When they exist, mostly in my head,
they do not answer back.
The private one who endears me so.
I have voluntarily turned my life
into a "Truman Show." Even if it is only
in the Global Village of YouTube.

Personal space designed
as social space. I have a relationship
with the one I most desire—
without fear or judgement,
the virtual self. With no one
to get in my face,
the only one I can bear
will be my own. And I climb
inside myself to very precise spots
to lick my wounds. I am addicted
to my world-wide journeys.
I am caught in its far-reaching web.
The Turing machine is real,
whose behavior is indistinguishable
to a competent judge.
Pernicious aspects of anything
are often inseparable
from the favorable ones.

Thus, in the jumbled waves
of invisible crap, I surf.

I Tweet,
Ergo Sum.

A SHIPWRECK IN A BOTTLE

MARKUS TEMPLETON

To be healed, I must hurt no more,
But my hands grasp the salted sea;
To feel alive I must drift ashore.

Loneliness is the most loveless war,
Which often resolves indecisively.
To be healed I must hurt no more.

This is what all debris thirsts for:
The stirring of oceanic country.
To feel alive I must drift ashore.

"Vacant," reads the label of the door;
I opened it and unearthed my grief.
To be healed I must hurt no more.

Crashing waves obtain endless encore
And demand that I do not leave;
To feel alive I must drift ashore.

Am I a shipwreck in a bottle or
Dreaming of sand beneath my feet?
To be healed I must hurt no more;
To feel alive I must drift ashore.

I'LL NEVER FORGET

ASHLEIGH DANIELS

I'll always remember how gentle your rough hands were,
even after an entire day working in your garden,
calluses thicker than bark on a pine tree.

I'll never forget the love in your voice,
even on days when you were exhausted,
tone warmer than a summer breeze.

I can't forget a kind smile gracing your lips,
even when the recipient had broken your heart,
spirit stronger than the oak tree we always sat under.

I remember your pain-filled eyes,
even as the morphine dragged you into a restless sleep,
countenance like that of the wounded bird we doctored.

The thing I think of most, though, is your calm expression,
even after eighty-nine years of joy and suffering,
more peaceful than the glassy lake we used to fish on.

ART

JAMES LEWIS HUSS

The frogs and crickets on the mountainside performed a splendid show. What unrehearsed and unknown opera troupe can sing with such a natural harmony and rhythm? Stars of heaven danced in synced and twinkling constellations, as meteorites upstaged them left and right. What play, what film, what masterpiece on silver screen compares with our vast galaxy? In the distance, scarcely visible in starlight, a wind-carved granite face loomed over a moonlit lake. I dreamed I was awake a thousand years ago, on the same mountain, looking at the same stars, listening to the remote ancestors of the same four- or more-legged creatures.

I never heard a melody from strings of piano or guitar.

I never wrote nor read a poem, novel, play, or tale.

I never ran my hand across the marble skin of an ancient bust.

But sitting there with family, under the trees and beneath the stars,

I had no prophecy of art, nor any need.

POETICALLY AROUSED

DELORES ATKINS

He said he wanted to hear my poetry
He wanted to hear my voice echo in an empty room
Have my syllables
drag across
his
back
like fingernails
feel them pierce his flesh as he sunk deeper in my ideas
He wanted my tongue to lick around his head and bless him with
this knowledge

Words he wanted to lick up and down his body till his mouth would
water
He wanted to cum inside my thoughts to give birth to his own
masterpiece
Knowing if he hit it right, I'd let him hear it again
Or at least allow him to reciprocate
Allow his rhythm to brush up against my walls
Allow his metaphors to bend me over in the right position for him to
attack my physical

Ask me to recite it how he taught me
Because last time I was on top
He told me to slow it down
Let him see how nasty I could get when I spit on it
The subject matter was too intense not to jump on it

Ride it

Grind my assonance on the content
 Till the rubber breaks
 He wasn't worried about it being safe
 As long as it was consensual
 The love making of our mental
 Outweighed anything I could do with the physical

Transcended the playing field
 So the foreplay means giving your mind 50 strokes with this pen
 Kissing your thoughts but you feel it on your thighs
 Deep conversations while looking at the other with your third eye

Baby wanted it so bad
 His hands would grip the bedsheets as if he could feel the pressure
 rising
 He begged me for it
 Pleaded with my goosebumps to stand with my viewpoint
 Unapologetically turned on to the fact that he could get off on me
 going off

So we let it flow
 Let our words run down our lips as we swapped tongues
 The consonance constantly keeping us coming back for more
 When the onomatopoeia echoed the headboard
 Erratically escalating our bodies in these stanzas
 We called the ancients by their first names and blessed each other
 Until the clocks stopped counting our time.

BUTTERBEER FRAPPUCINO

SHUNDRIKA SMITH

I wanna love you like
Starbucks' hidden menu
all new and sweet and wondrous
bursting with weird flavors
that mix and combine
and set my atmosphere alight
propelling me past the planets
kissing Pluto's dead light
and, oh! the sight of my love
crashes into me, wild and free
tracing galaxies upon me
as we simmer so sweetly
here in this make-believe reality
two stars twirling madly
unabashedly denying gravity

ULTIMATE SURRENDER

KATIE RAYBURN

Bed sheets, white and thin,
Frail dreams left on cotton.
Forget all our troubles,
Stay here with me.
If times were better,
If peace were possible,
Maybe then I could—
Could have kept you here,
In this world.
Times called for war.
War called for blood.
Blood came from the living.
It was only natural.
I remember the day you left,
And the days you never returned.
In a fit, I tore the sheets
We once shared happily.
I took one ragged square
And waved it about
Frantically. Furiously.
Terrified it wouldn't be enough.
Knowing it wouldn't be enough.
I gave in, fell to my knees,
And the white fabric enveloped me
Like arms that had no strength
Left to fight.

CONFESSIONS

AMBER MARTIN

My life consists of
 clasping onto clay rocks
That fold between my fingers and
 fall apart.

Breathe.

Breathing was never easy.

I don't remember the scalpel
or the way it pierced my
 newly born flesh.
I wonder if my infant screams
echoed down the hall
or if my screams were silent
like my laughs
 when air doesn't reach my lungs
my swiss cheese cysts
expanding and begging to rupture,
while my left lung allowed passage to
 the desired O

*cold steel
meets bare flesh
sweet smelling gas
and hummingbird liquid
poured down my throat*

*my name called out and trying
 desperately
 to respond
 until my eyes closed to black
 and I watched
 an array of oranges, pinks, and yellows
 dance across my eyelids
 my name echoing
 then.
 darkness.*

I'd like to think I was a brave
 nine-year-old

My hands tucked beneath my back.
 My ears picking up my
 choppy, diseased breathing;
 like something was lodged into my throat.
 Eyeing the small white L
 on the nightstand,
 tempting me with its bitter sweetness.
 "It'll help you breathe,"
 says the woman in the white coat,
 her tall slim form smiling down at me.
 I hated medicine and needles.
 These inventions that were supposed to
 fulfill my childhood wishes
 of wanting to
 breathe.
 I just wanted to breathe.

So I lay in bed,
my palms sweaty and tingling
from lying beneath me
and counted
One

Two

Three

Breathe

One

Two

Three

*I was in a garden
filled with roses
and azaleas
watching a white swing
hanging from a branch
and butterflies
flying and turning
into fairies
while snapdragons
bent to the
commands of the wind*

There was a time
when my body was frail
and too slim.

When my hair was
the color of wheat
and my skin was
as white as a sheet.

Then they cracked the
bones in my chest
and placed the cold steel,
 lifting my sternum
till bone mended
and the cold foreign object
was removed,
leaving behind new
wounds.

*I lay in a
frigid cold room
the only warmth
coming from the far left
window
my hair laid out
in golden waves
needles pressed
beneath my flesh
my mouth dry like
hot dirt in summer.*

ARISE, SATURN, ARISE

HEATHER MATHIS

Set on my pride, ashamed to say
that there may be no other way...
except to watch it, day by day—
the loss of timeless love.

I've known these years, as they have passed,
the selflessness of love will last
for just as long as time runs fast—
and then, will ebb away.

My selfish, callow heart will bleed,
and if they try, no soul will lead
me to the respite I will need—
I've been careless with their love.

Time has been my friend, and foe—
the likes of which I'll never know.
Wherever it may lead, I'll go...

Arise, Saturn, Arise.

3RD PLACE

FACE YOURSELF

HEATHER MATHIS

Face yourself and you will find me
locked within your shallow womb.
Seek the past and don't remember
what you think I have assumed.
Caress the embers, fan the flame
that is both the love and hate.
Do not think that I surrender,
I understand it is our fate—
entwined and fragile.
What I see you don't remember,
Locked within your deeper slumber.
What I feel you can't imagine—
the mesh of both pity and plunder.
Embrace the waters—bathe in tears
that will not dry from both our eyes.
I do not fault you for our losses
It is mere fate that I despise...
awry and hostile.
Thoughts of harshness break the soul,
ripping from the heart we share.
I see you, feel you, and your wounds—
never lose me; I still care.
Day by day I cannot show it,
for the pain absorbs my soul—
This does not mean my trials have ended;
My mother is my mortal coil.
Warm and safe
within my heart;
forever drowned
inside.

OSCILLATION

CRISTA CAGNEY

Why was Winston wicked?
Sitting in circles sharing secrets
we were wearing weathered
Converses. "Coping can't cure
your youthful yearning," you
said. Shyly & slightly,
I looked, laughed, & laced
my miss matched mitts.

Each event, every
Possible percent of the time
I feel the presence of
tremendous targets taped to my
face. His "Fun Facts" flick flecks of
reality into my
burned, brushed, beaten, barely-there blanket of a world.

I look down, doing dangerous devilish
replays & reviews in my wrecked mind,
and I see
veins varying in violets
some green, grey, gross, getting better.

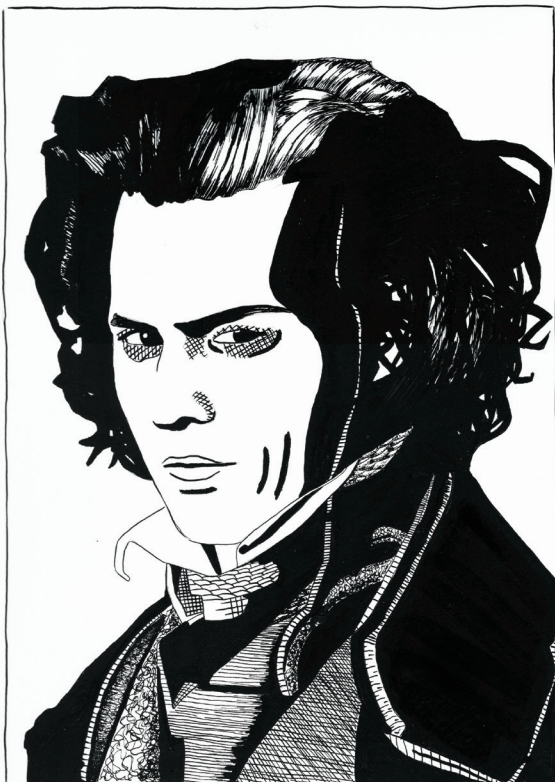
Winston—"Always aim!" "Attain!" "Achieve!"

Me—Walking while winds wind, whisper, wrap, and waste you?
Winston, why? When your words would wickedly whip me down just
as hard. No, you are more like "Attack!" "Annihilate!" "Abrogate!"

Confessing can't cure cancer, but can cause confusion. Can cause chaos.

So sitting in circles sharing secrets
between bi-weekly visits because blood, my blood,
doesn't dare desire to stream inside me.
And yet you, yes, you
lecture me on
youthful yearning, yet you
don't seem to comprehend that I don't care about
secret sharing circles,
withered and weathered worn footwear,
annoying anti-productive antics.

I just want to live a little longer.
Or do I want to die a little sooner?



UNITY

MATTHEW MIMS

City streets and faint lights paint a
grave site, unlike any generation.
Children play in grassless jungles
for days and constantly wait for
the handouts of government
payment.

Who is waiting? Unity is waiting.
Hard times are vacant.

Mama still cooking hope when
the crime rate is escalating.

Down goes Frazier,
Martin Muhammad Malcolm Rosa
(rose us) better than the other
races.

Run a good walk if your pace fits,
Trading information faster than
our foreparents on slaveships.

Tasteless;
Extending borrowed time with a
facelift,

Lift your faces.

Tilt your head back and be
graceful.

Vanity drives insanity into
unknown places.

Unify the body, mind, & spirit then
God might save us.

CHILL

STEPHANIE YATES

It doesn't matter. He doesn't love you. He never did. You had sex. That was it. It's over. He's a good guy. You don't hate him. It doesn't matter. He doesn't love you. He never did. You had sex. That was it. It's over. He's a good guy. You don't hate him. She's your friend. She doesn't love him. It was unavoidable. She doesn't want him. You are okay. She's your friend. She doesn't love him. It was unavoidable. She doesn't want him. You are okay. It doesn't matter. He doesn't love you. He never did. You had sex. That was it. It's over. He's a good guy. You don't hate him. Maybe he loves her. Be happy for them. Maybe he loves her. Be happy for them. It doesn't matter. He doesn't love you. He never did. You had sex. That was it. It's over. He's a good guy. You don't hate him.

I LAG FAR BEHIND YOU

CHARLES MAC HAMILTON

You have to fool the brain,
Change to get it where it thinks it should be.
In order to get a zoned comfort,
It's like the weather—always better somewhere else.

Change to get the brain to where it thinks it should be.
So I'll just get some fake fire logs, and a washer and dryer, twelve
months same as cash.
It's like the weather—always better somewhere else.
We're not good right now, two gentle souls who love.

So I'll get some fake fire logs.
I'll talk to animals in accents
about war and hate in my heart.
We're not good right now, two gentle souls who love.
Can I call you when I don't feel sick anymore?

I'm talking to animals in accents about war and hate in my heart,
A sad poem from a troubadour—is this where we are now?
Can I call you when I don't feel sad anymore?
Please don't be angry with me and please do not dance on my
heart.

A sad song from a troubadour—is this where we are now?
I'm contending with the fine line between love and war.
Please don't be angry with me and please do not dance on my
heart.
You're way ahead of me, severe anxiety over decisions at hand.

I'm contending with the fine line between love and war.
 I had asked you to understand that I'm not doing well.
 You're way ahead of me, severe anxiety over decisions at hand.
 Elsewhere, it will be better—please wait to touch me when I am
 better.

I had asked you to understand that I'm not doing well.
 Please tell me that you're ahead of me.
 Elsewhere, it will be better—please wait to touch me when I am
 better.
 I lag far behind you in the licking of my wounds.

Please assure me that you're ahead of me,
 That your heart has been cleansed by stalking barnacles.
 I lag far behind you in the licking of my wounds,
 My heart mostly leading into uncharted waters of abashed acumen.

That your heart has been cleansed of stalking barnacle,
 Is notice enough for me—I'll change quickly like the weather
 Because of the unabashed acumen into uncharted waters.
 I'm contending with a fine line from the troubadour's dirge.

HONORABLE MENTION

I WAS SCARED ONCE

CRISTA CAGNEY

I was scared once
 in the love seat of a travel bus
 little primos with white teeth and bronze faces
 and bright eyes grinned back at me.

The roller coaster hills were
blanketed green with piñas, platanos, and mangoes
 causing a rising urge
 of thirst to course through our bodies,
amplifying the heat that is engulfed in the quilted
patches of the valleys that curve as we pass.

Stop.

The sweet taste of water as it quenches the
parched ache of my throat as the
agua fresca went around,
and how it
soaked through old navy
as Tio pumped his way through the next curve.
And we all said wee.

Stop.

Curves are what we are made of in this world and watching the hills
roll by, my hands damp in the grip of another I first saw it.
 Something green
 Something leafy
 Something round.

Stop.

*I remember hiding behind a small bony shoulder
and trembling
and he whispered
I won't tell
But it was all make-believe because I
was never allowed to be that word.
But they wanted to watch it.
They wanted to see it.*

STOP.

With effort, Tio stopped the wheels and everyone dismounted
small feet pattering like rain on tin rooftops
to find the leafy rolling heads.

Sticking to adults like cysts they all hovered near the doors to home
but I was not that word.

Stop.

*I kept my eyes shut tight and pressed
one hand
on one ear.
Is this really
all make
believe?*

Just Stop.

I found that hoard of vegetation,

to prove that I am not a sissy or lack motivation,
and saw the piles of cabbage now stained red.
All the while during the search and confiscation of decapitated greens
not a car passed.

But now.

One

Two

Three

Not a one hesitated in consideration
to the rusted beat-up lemon,
to the broken juan soul
to the cries of a macaw
reverberating no longer dampened by the blanket of the valley.

One

Two

Three

And they won't stop
staring
at
him.

*Screams echo all around
along with laughter and
I press into the love seat
wishing to be absorbed into
it.*

*Its almost over
Its all make believe*

FARCICAL EPIC

HAYDEN ELLENDER

When I was a young man I heard a story of a brave young captain.
He commanded a ship, a great mighty ship, and its name was
Kraken. On the ship there was a crew. Jim Beam, Jack Daniels, and
Cuervo, and they were good men. The mutt named Taaka followed
the crew and stowed away from their last trip to the Caribbean.

One day on the Sea of Beers,
The young Captain Morgan faced his greatest fear.
For out of the sea, off of the port bow, rose Jectur.
Slimy and Pink, this creature did stink, hideous from beginning to
rear.

The creature reached out and grabbed Jack and Jim, but they made
it hard to swallow. Finally forced down, the creature, it found the
ship's very valuable cargo. Courage it found, of the liquid variety,
and it grabbed it so it could go. The creature reached down and
grabbed, and with a mighty surprise, it grabbed old Señor Cuervo.

With only Morgan and Taakka left, they leapt onto the ship's
deck. They raced farther down, looking for a cannon to shoot the
creature's ugly neck. With two cannons primed, the captain did
shoot, the creature was left a wreck. Shot after shot the captain did
prime, and shot the creature, trying to render it a speck. With one
last try, the creature did die, but too late, for its teeth and Taaka
have met.

The captain lay there, washed up and beaten, by a creature that now
lay dead. Pondering and thinking about where next he must go,
and without a ship the captain did dread. But he heard of a ship he
could buy called Bayou, and Louisiana was its bed. So as quick as he
could he bought that ship before the gallows found his head.



**PHOTOGRAPHY
& FINE ART**

EDITOR'S CHOICE



EARTH AND SKY

HEATHER MATTHIS



PERSPECTIVE

CAITLIN O'NEAL

3RD PLACE



STILL LIFE

LESLIE CRISWELL

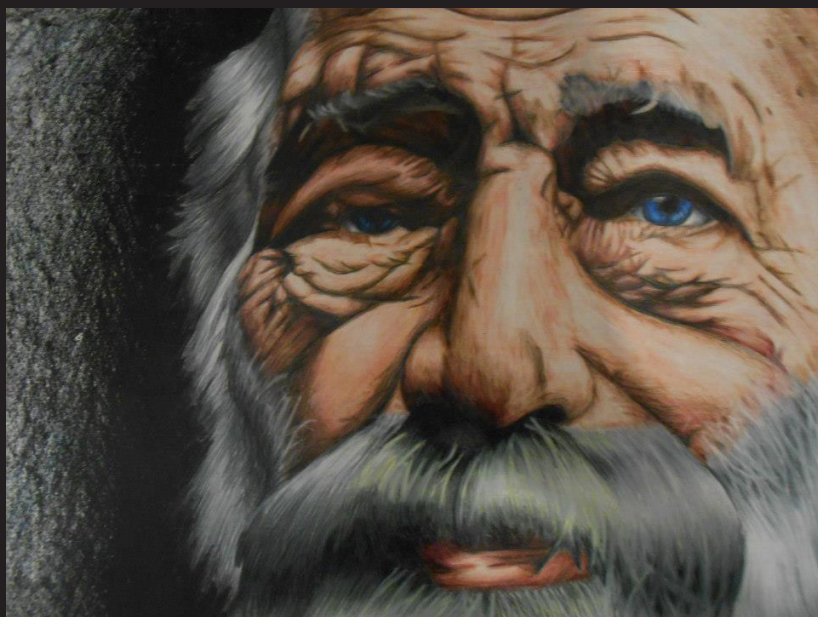
3RD PLACE



ABOVE ADELBODEN

MARIE ROBICHAUX

2ND PLACE



AN AGED FACE

JOHN CAMPBELL

2ND PLACE



FOR CELIE

CAITLIN O'NEAL

1ST PLACE



COLD PRINT

JESSICA CROSS

1ST PLACE



RESTORED HOPE

LESLIE CRISWELL



“WRITING IS BOTH MASK AND UNVEILING”

- E.B. WHITE

EVERYTHING I FIND BEAUTIFUL IN HER

RACHEL LAVERGNE

Waiting in the eye of the storm
One can stop and ponder
Does the raging space around you
Distort or consume
Who you are?
Does it reflect the constant battle waging inside
The plight of darkness and light
Or does it just leave openness and comfort to grow?
Can you see the things that your mind has been trying to hide?
What about all the unnecessary distractions that are nowhere to be
found?
Is there peace or do you see the darker forms of reality?
I guess once you answer these questions you realize
It's irrelevant because
She's a hurricane
A light that flickers warding off the darkness
She dances like a poet
Seduction with her movements as
There's this galaxy within her body
You can see the stars within her eyes
Or the fire raging beneath her skin
The nerves and pulsing of her heartbeats
Dancing and shooting like meteors in the sky
The place where her soul is shrouded in darkness
Reminds me of a black hole embracing a universe of its own
Her breath reminds me of all the people who have lived and died

before us
She is a creation worth dying for
Loving this person gave me a reason to live
It's not that I need her to have a life or be with someone else to see
the importance of mine
But she makes me see things differently
I wish she felt all these words I try to hide behind my whispers and
enchanting kisses
Placed tauntingly on her neck
I never knew the depth behind the word beauty until
Her eyes found mine
And my heart understood why
She gave me meaning in a world that challenges and tests the
essence of my being
But she and so many others like her are why
I have faith How could one such as she not have been intended by
someone outside of the world of my own
She is beyond the definitions of perfection
For she is a creature of more profound
Creating than the words to describe life itself.

THE BEEHIVE BEHAVES STRANGELY

CHARLES MAC HAMILTON

Fumbling twigs splattered
among grassy leaves and
Greenspan's photograph.
Bean counters lean into their soil
like early morning starlings

The golden trumpet's alarm
makes the drones green with envy.
With nowhere to hide,
the Beehive behaves strangely
in dark circles.

A locked nave negates
two thieves in the dead of night.
The stand-in for salvation hangs out
alone, staring blankly at a mirrored
hallway of armored trucks.

Penance is sterile, paltry and pointless—
miserable mediocrity
So He spews them out His mouth
for their lukewarm love of war
and persistent pestilences.

Swarms, plagues, broods of Elders
clasp hands in front of their penises
to hide from God's hatred
for the woodies beside the wafers
and wine substitutions.

Profiteers gargle
on mammon's mouthwash
from a gin-glistened smell of the kill.
Adding machines total the dead,
ignore the cost.

Outdated B-52's find no solace
in the sweet catacombs.
Tiny golden buzzers sound alarm,
and alarm, while the Beehive behaves strangely
in dark circles.

Off to their lairs they go, to witness
the suffocation of their offspring—
the wolverines fetch the leaves
with their genitals. And the stand-in
for the Queen waits and waits and waits.

DAVEED

CRISTA CAGNEY

I fell from grace and shattered like stars across the sky when I saw
your hands.

Hands.

Too large and knobby, they could fit me in them, I would feel safe
and no one would make fun of my plump figure, curvy hips, flushed
lips, and moon-blessed waist.

Waist.

Looking up at you in this crowded neon sepulcher, I can see why
everyone would want you in their possession, why men would shape
themselves as you at their core, why women want their champion to
be you.

You

Are looking off into the distance of my soul, breaking down every
piece of me, asking all the wrong answers and making me question
the reality of this world. With eyes fixated on something I can never
see, I yearn to be the one who can decipher the messages that were
etched into your indulgent marble overlay,

*And why are all of the girls in class giggling?
Why won't they stop with their venomous taunts?
Their wicked comments as I look?
Are you not so beautiful?*

"Disproportionate to the naked eye,"
Mikey wanted you to be proportionate to his mind's eye.

You were my first love.

Love.
Of art that is.

IN DEFENSE OF THE STAGE

KELIA ROWAN

People are always trying to talk down the theatre
As if what we make here is somehow less art
As if Shakespeare and Williams live dissected littered on English
classroom floors.

As if drudging up another person from the foundations of my heart
is easy As if the strain in my vocal chords As I struggle to reach the
highs and the lows is imagined As if the ache in my muscles after I
dance is somehow less real Because it happened in a studio instead
of on a football field.

The next time somebody talks to me like that I will throw myself
open for them, Show them The welded joints of my bones The paint
that I bleed The woodwork of my vertebra The rigging in the sinew
of my muscle The ghosts of constellations that linger when my eyes
shutter.

And when the powder sets They will see That this connection
between black and red is alive This world and my future do not
need their permission
To Exist

I DON'T NEED IT

ALECIA ALFORD

Artfully ripped jeans... skinny, full.
Sidewise glance.
Still my thighs, my face, my hands...
No skirt of tulle
or Gucci-Prada bag
is mask enough, despite the tag.
For body mine, so thick, so full...
is here to stay
to my dismay!
What fool!
For mask, though pretty,
is false and petty...
And does not my face, my flaws still pull...
yes, pull the eyes, the glance,
of him and her and
all who dance all the night through?
Then, just perhaps,
I don't need the mask.

NAIL-BITER

ASHLEIGH DANIELS

I'm not really sure when it started.
Maybe when the meltdowns started,
When the yelling and crying was too much for me to handle.

I'm not sure why it started,
Maybe it was the feeling of helplessness that suffocates me
When there's nothing I can do to help.

I can't help but feel ashamed,
Especially when my friends comment,
When I've chewed them down to the quick,
When it looks like I clawed myself up from a grave.

I try to stop myself,
I use vinegar, nail polish remover, onions.
But nothing can curb the urge.

My lips burn, my nostrils flare,
But the only thing that can calm my racing heart
Is my fingernails between my teeth.

LIFE

JAMES LEWIS HUSS

The leaf grows green, red,
Brown, then falls dead to the ground,
But the tree lives on.

Drops of water splash
Away and evaporate,
Still the river runs.

A flock of birds,
Though It loses one,
Will tack and veer in unison.

The ant that thrives in
Colony cannot survive
Independently.

We are the leaves who
Have forgotten we are but
A part of the tree.

MEASURE, WEIGH, DECIDE

ALECIA ALFORD

I am me, yet I am you.
Your eyes measure, and weigh,
and decide:
Who am I?
And then there are two of me...
Or three, or five, or sixteen.
As you and me, and she and they
decide and make me who I am.
Shape and Form are to be
as also they are to see.
Yet seeing, being...
Who decides?
Real or lies or in-between...
The me that's me or the me that's you?
Who's who? Who's True?
I, me
He, she
They, it...
we.
I am me, but I am you...
And we,
We are Who?

THE UGLY

JENNIFER PEEDIN

I went for a walk through town last night.
The children were all asleep, the cicadas loud as hell.
Air was heavy and humid, a storm coming fast.
I walked past the park, the shops, the school, all dark.
The mountains loomed, and I saw it.
It's bigger than they say, vicious and ugly.

Rumors are all they've been until I saw the ugly
Face upon the body that was as dark as night.
I stopped quick. He stopped slow. Was I now the it?
Slouching, he stood straight. Its eyes were hell.
They glowed blue and red; fire and ice in the dark.
Thunder grumbled and lightning shot across the sky fast.

It went like a shot and I started running, fast.
Falling, tripping, running ugly. No matter.
Bats never fly straight when they leave hell.
Up the road, on the mountain, and into the dark.
He was crashing behind me, a monster from the night.
Slipped on a rock, hid in the bushes, where was it?

It was quiet. I was still. Oh god, where was it?
There was a voice, a man, over the ridge. Shut him up fast!
It found him, and the screams were straight from hell.
Smacking his lips, bones crushing, meal times were ugly.
I moved and crawled, so slow, trusting the night
Would cover my trembling body from the dark.

His meal finished, the smell of blood sharp in the dark.
I said a quiet prayer, my breathing heavy, hiding from it.
No sound from him. I lit off into the darkest night.
Knowing he would be full he couldn't be that fast.
Dead wrong. It stepped in front of me with that face so ugly.
I dove down the mountain. Can't catch me. No way in hell.

He grabbed me. I was next. This was it. Oh hell.
My neck bit and open then everything went dark.
I came to and saw eyes over me. They weren't so ugly.
Fire and ice. My body was fire. Blood pumping through it.
Too quick though. Then peace. I was fire and ice. I stood up fast
With a face so ugly, and a body as dark as the night.

I LIVE HERE AND YOU LIVE THERE

JENNIFER PEEDIN

Jamie in North Carolina called me in Korea. She lives in a house with hallways and bathtubs and a backyard full of shade. Jamie in North Carolina has a driveway and a carpet for her toddler. We talked and I sat on my bed, a bed with no frame, and could see all there was to see in my home. I have a room. A room. Singular, with four walls to keep the neighbors confined to their four walls. I live in a rectangle with a door and a window. My laundry hangs stale, sad, exposed in front of that window. Lindsey in Indiana wrote me a letter. Lindsey in Indiana has a garden where sunflowers shine in her kitchen windows. She told me about them. I told her that Leslie from the Tenth Floor comes and sits in the kitchen, living room and bedroom all at the same time. My room is an open country with no borders. Cynthia in Maine complains about the mass of grass in her yard and the clutter in the gutter. I tell her about the feral cats outside eating trash and that my sheets always smell like my dinner. Fish, onions, and garlic all seep into the pink wallpaper that I would never choose. And my neighbor has a cold. I hear him hack and sneeze through my parlor pink wallpaper. My friends in America have houses with backyard barbeques and perfectly painted walls, and I...well I live here and have a neighbor with a cold and a window with no view.

TELEGRAM OF SINCERE REGRET

KATIE RAYBURN

The Secretary of War
Deeply regrets to
inform you
That your son—

The Secretary of War
Expresses his
deepest regret
That your son—

The Secretary of War
Assures you of his
deep sympathy
That your son—

The Secretary of War
Offers his
deepest apologies
That your son—

The mother of these men
Deeply regrets to inform you
That she only gave birth to four.

SAFE “PASS”AGE

AIRROL ANGELLE

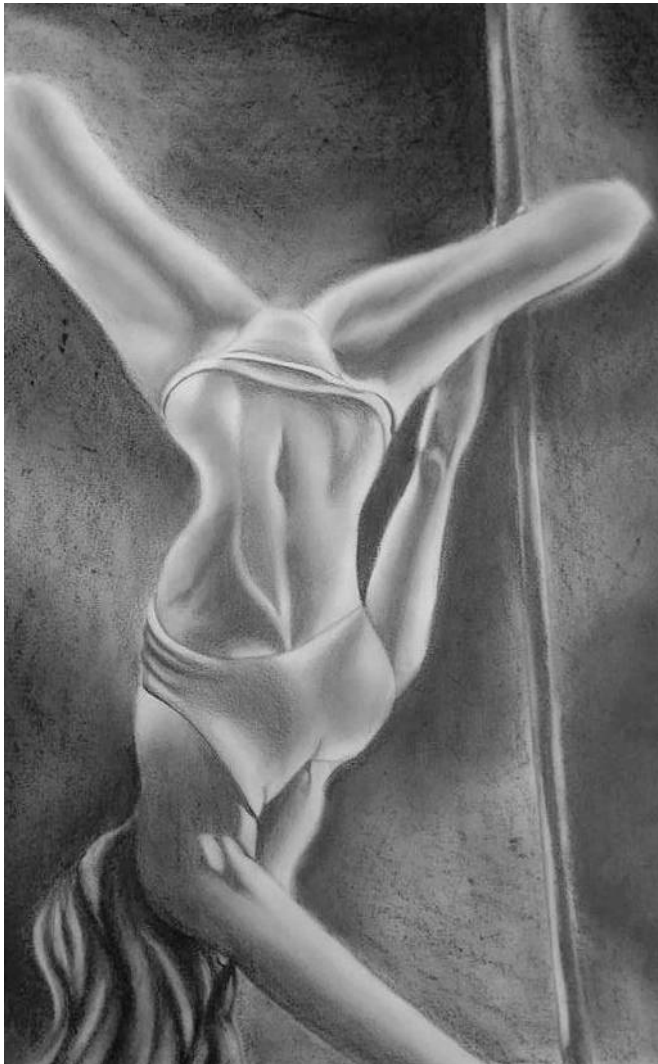
You don't mean to say "transphobic,"
How could you panic
While you harass me on the street?
Learn the new linguistic,
You mean to say TRANSANTAGONISTIC.
While you knock me off my feet
To beat out of me
My "biological" sex characteristic.
I'm cisphobic
And unapologetic,
Not afraid of your rejection.
Be more humanistic!
Stop using potential support as a weapon.
Trying to silence my "aggression"
By withholding your "affection".
I'm individualistic;
Ever heard, "freedom of expression"?

Here's a lesson:

It's not just for your protection,

Used when you want to threaten.

Safe "pass"age isn't too idealistic.



DEATH PARADE, AN ELEGY FOR ME

STEPHANIE ALLEN

I guess death finally pinned you down.
 I bet that ole' grim had to put you in a chokehold
 Kicking and screaming because even when life sucked, it still was
 good.
 Tears and overdramatic relatives are cutting up.
 Chile...
 Anyway, sorry pal, but they refused to play "Gangsta's paradise."
 They wouldn't even substitute "Crossroads" for you.
 Selfish prawns!
 Instead you got a nice Catholic service
 even though you haven't practiced that religion in years.
 I hate that picture they have placed in the front.
 Man, they really acted like you could have been related to an angel.
 Snorts. You were a good person but not that innocent. I want to
 know what was in that beer they chugged last night.
 Also, the millions of cousins you don't know...
 For some reason showed...
 were questioning your sexuality.
 Guess dying alone, childless and covered in tattoos equals demonic
 version of sexual deviant.
 Gotta love southern gossip
 And them creatures that are breathing unnecessary air.
 But, hey, at least mamma didn't burn you!
 Now if we could get them peoples to stop lying.
 It might turn out to be a decent memorial service for me.
 Man, I hate being dead!

MEDITATIONS ON POETRY

JAMES LEWIS HUSS

A thought is not a feeling, just a thought—
His words and phrases founder to convey
The love, the strife, the sufferings of life,
And so the poet's labor never ends.

His words and phrases founder to convey
The pain and sorrow of his jaded heart,
And so the poet's labor never ends
To fabricate with ink the voice within.

The pain and sorrow of his jaded heart
Do not translate to book, or scroll, or page.
To fabricate with ink the voice within,
The poet must subdue the voice without.

Do not translate to book, or scroll, or page
The constant prating of the conscious brain.
The poet must subdue the voice without
And feel, not hear, the Muse's subtle calls.

The constant prating of the conscious brain—
Debating rhyme and meter—stalls the verse.
To feel, not hear, the Muse's subtle call,

A settled mind the poet has to find.
Debating rhyme and meter stalls the verse!
Despite the strife and sufferings of life,
A settled mind the poet has to find—
A thought is not a feeling, just a thought.

SANCTUARY

ALECIA ALFORD

Remorse.
A blanket of Shame
Concealed by the sheer
Front of
Happiness and Near Perfection.
Lies.
Honey-covered words
Calculated Reactions
And Slight Exagerations.
Shocked would be their faces...
If only they knew...
What truly lay beneath
that so very carefully
created Facade.
Intricate details
Placed in Perfect Form...
Woven into a Pristinely Perfect
Web.
This is the Sanctuary...
From all the world to Hide.
She hides her face and screams inside...
Her Sanctuary...

NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE

KATIE RAYBURN

I watched the news
With hope growing cold.
I've learned early on that
Nothing good is ever
called "Breaking News."
On this day, we all watched—
And suddenly it was just me—
I watched a man
Gunned down and called
A victim and a terrorist.
The news station made me sick,
Revolted by the choices that
Our society makes.
They didn't have to show the video.
They could have told us,
Explained through words the horror,
That in these times would never be
Unimaginable.
But they played the video,
And we watched a man die.
They knew people wanted to see it.
And what made me sickest of all,
Is that part of me did too.

DREAM/CATCH/ER

MATTHEW MIMS

Somebody stole my dream, could you believe?
Or understand how hurt I am because I can't remember a thing.
A smooth criminal,
One that can send shots in distress covered in subliminals. Give me
back my mental
So I can understand how love feels,
Lay next to me and take my breath from me.
Every position changes but we stay the same like windmills For
better or worse
A curse of amnesia I wish to reverse
This hurts more than the common mistake
If sunshine can bring better days I'd pave a road of tears onto the
night to take the pain away.
Questions continuously contemplate,
Are you the east that can rest on my chest when the nighttime
awaits?
Would a thousand times goodnight suffice for the wrongs that we
right through the arguments and fights?
That's life attached with no receipt,
On the loneliest rainiest nights I like to creep.
Allow me to operate in your dreams like they were meant for me.
Manifesting positions only I can fathom,
From this world to the fetus we all shall gather.
A mansion in the swamps With a pumpkin still for a carriage Which
one of the sixty-four do your claim as your parish?
I Be Everything Radicals Vastly Inquire Leveling Lectures Education

(Iberville)

Down before the emancipation proclaimed any black man's
imagination.

Or conjured upon a bus or a march, a hurdle or a confused
distinctive voice.

I chose to live forever not by choice.

Rehearsing my return with a movement.

An ensemble to bring back my true love when the moon is lantern-
lit and shadows face the east.

When the earth cracks open with a mouth wide as the depth of the
sea.

Call upon my name and I shall be.

With a boatload of dreams and wine to dine and bread to eat.

The life of a sailor is captivating, I arrive out of the marsh where
tomorrow is now and here is later.

Kaleidoscope themes make everything seem fabricated.

But when you're as beautiful as her she gives me the confidence to
sail a spaceship.

She is my starship,

My northern light,

The one I could call on when things go bump in the night.

Somebody stole my dream, luckily it was you.

But you just don't know it yet and I wish it were true.

NO HEROES ALLOWED

DAKOTA NEWMAN

I never understood why battered women went back to the person
that abused them.

Until a friend was more like a foe,
And no matter what he said or how he threatened me,
I never left.

I never understood that love isn't a kind thing,
Until he said that he loved me.
Until love was twisted and tainted by sweet words, harsh realities,
and false motivations. Until I couldn't help but love him back.

I never understood the pull, like a sweet siren call, that beckons a
woman back into their abuser's
embrace.
Transfixed by their abuser's smile.
Suffocated by their abuser's scent.
Comforted by their abuser's lies.

I never understood why battered women couldn't understand how
bad their situation was,
Until I was standing in the eye of the storm,
On the edge of the precipice, Never fully understanding how the
situation was escalating. I didn't see the red flags,
I painted them black and blue like the emotionally battered woman
I was.

I never understood why battered women went back to their abusers.
Until the image of a battered woman looked back at me.
I never understand why I went back.

FIREBALL

SHUNDRIKA SMITH

To taste your quiet fears I want
to marvel at your essence;
your eyes pour the sweetest of wines
and I, in your presence,
thrive upon your nature
an advocate of the numbing inebriation.

Frozen is your face in the eyes of the many,
but I know your scalding soul
how it enflames the blood within, secretly,
a raging wildfire barely contained,
a storm waiting to lay waste.

My love floods your facade one ember at a time
until your flames die and I can gaze upon
your smokey eyes and know that you are mine.

SAVE FACE

MAGGIE HARRIS

"Growing up" describes the transitional time period in which you are occupied with fashioning a second face.

This face resembles the one you had as a child—

Only your new mien must mask your anger, your disappointment, your desire.

There are three basic molds you can start with: Comparable, Compatible, and Clone.

Keep it same, keep it sane.

After you pick your mold, you begin the modification process.

Fit it to your face.

Adjust the features as needed.

A fortnight will be spent on the mechanics of smiling alone.

Note: the switch from manual to automatic can be a bit tricky.

Adjust the setting for when you see your mom.

Mothers can cause malfunction,

Such as a reversion to the original settings.

To avoid this, turn the left corner a quarter of a half-smile upward.

Not too tight. Not too broad.

Just enough for her to feel safe.

Then there's the matter of the eyes.

Gaze default should be set to Downward.

Recommended: Paint the glaze a little thick.

You want to emulate the glassy look.

Clarity is the enemy.

The expression is simple.
Tired, disinterested—
But not downcast.
Add some worry lines.
People won't trust you without them.

Take your new face out every so often.
See how people react to it.
A nose rigged to wrinkle too slowly could give you away.

Once you've made the necessary modifications,
You can safely enter the realm of adulthood.

Safe.

Same.

Sane.

No shame.

Initially, there are those that find their new faces uncomfortable.
They may choose to take them off in private.
This helps with the stench.

Don't worry, you'll adjust to it.
After so long, you'll find you don't even need to loosen it up to see
out of
Or to breathe.
After so many wears, it sets permanently.

CONTACTS

KATIE RAYBURN

Contacts suggest disability,
And that fact is true.
For without these I cannot see,
And yet with them,
I am blinded still.
My entire vision is sheltered
By this thin and fragile piece.
For my true eyes see blurs
Of colors and shapes colliding.
And unlike glasses, there is no
Side apart from this focus.
Without them I am lost
In a sea of oddly shaped creatures,
Who I can discern of no particular shade.
With contacts, I see perfectly,
In a literal sense.
But people blinded more than I
Wear a type of contacts
That focuses their vision,
But not the truth.

HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY

NICHOLAS JONES 14.FEBRUARY.2013

I draw lines,
With my tongue,
Down her back,
Towards her spine,
Making memories,
I will cherish forever,

I hold her closer,
Feel her curves,
Her softest, sweetest skin,
Fragrance of Sandalwood,
Radiating from inside,
Her fruits of desire,
I suck the juices out,
And the flies turn green with envy,

I hold her,
For a moment in time,
And wonder how
I could ever love anyone more,
More than I love her tonight,

Now as I'm writing,
I love her even more,
I realize,

And then I shed a tear,
Saying Happy Valentine's Day to my angel,
Who died last year.

DREAMS

NICOLAS JONES 06. APRIL .2015

When you get cut,
I want to be the one that bleeds,
Because I'd rather have an open flesh wound, than ever wear a
Band-Aid in public,

Dreams,
They become the things we talk about,
Instead of the things we do,

"One day,
We'll leave this place,
Go to the city,
Get an apartment,
It may not be big,
But we'll have each other,
And our record player,
I love you,
And love is all we need,
Just think of all we can do,
Together,"

You said that we would rule the world,
Like Buckingham-Nicks,
Because we were just that fucking great,
An act the world could appreciate,
That after all the Grammy awards,
And sold out shows,

When we've done all we can do,
We'd look into each other's eyes,
And we'd never wonder if we made the right choice,
By choosing each other,

Those were the best days,
Of my life,
Because I saw the future,
In your eyes,
And I may have been scared,
But I never stopped loving you,

"Live high or die trying," That's what you said,
And I believed you,
And I know how foolish it is,
But I still do,

Dreams,
They become the things we talk about,
Instead of the things we do.

MIXED MEDIA BEING

DAKOTA NEWMAN

I think art is in my soul,
And paint is in my veins.
Acrylic is my skin,
And oil gives life to my features.

My body is a palette of colors.
A conglomerate of techniques,
Mixed together to create,
An ever-changing portrait.
I am simply a mixed media being.

DAYDREAMER, YOU LEFT YOUR BODY IN CALCULUS CLASS

MEG DENNY

Your feet look small in those Vans,
did you mean that?
Looks like you want to stomp yourself down under.
Maybe you're thinking about the party.
X last night and her
eleven different lips, that's twenty-two foreign feet.
Do you still feel
mattered?

Your head is not your feet all broad and beanie'd
not tucked under the desk.
Only eleven faces and eleven lips...
Is that why your crown bellows, not hid at all away?
Multiple minds won't trample yours,
oh no, but
twenty-two heels and
what could you do?

Calculus class can't save you from real breaks in heart
or soul or sole or shoelaces.

You look small in those Vans, What are you lying about? Where are
you lying about? When you feel able enough
to unshoe foot and forget
sense or stink or sink or sad, whose room are you in?
I've looked and lost.
Help me track your calming down.
You promised to teach me Limits.

DEVIL ROBED IN WHITE

DAKOTA NEWMAN

Nothing in my life has ever smelled as good as him.
He was desperate, domineering, and disastrous.
His skin was barbed wire but each prick did not discourage me.
His hands were scythes,
Reaping my soul from conviction until I remained empty.
His fingers were claws that carved into my heart, scarring me with his
name,
Forever embedded into my bloodstream.
His arms were whips that left gashes each time he embraced me.

His hair felt like hay, coarse and fine.
Golden to see but unpleasant to touch.
His gaze was like shards of ice,
Freezing my morals until my conscience thawed his hypnosis.
I'm sure he tasted like poison, but I would have drunk my fill anyway.
His lips were like pins and needles, running all over my skin,
numbing my senses.
His lips tasted like rotting flesh, from the erosion of his soul.

He would have taken everything from me,
If it had not been for his forked tongue.
Sliding over my own,
Breathing words into me that I didn't know.
His words were like venom, soaking into my soul, contaminating my
DNA.
I gagged on the words being forced down my throat,
In the end he wasn't pleased that I couldn't accept all that he'd
done to me.

He led me like the lamb to the slaughter.
He made his soul to look the same as mine
But he was lust manifested to tempt me,
Since his presence alone awoke my demons.
He'd turned me into a corpse,
Filling me with a need for flesh.
He became a part of me.
To me he was twisted love embodied,
And a passion I still crave to feed.



JONATHAN

MEG DENNY

The last time we ate together, you took me for lunch to a build-your-own-burrito joint

Near Arapahoe Avenue.

I read off my acrostic for you at the table because

At the time

I wanted to be known for my acrostics, apparently.

Jeez,

Our

Nights

Are

The

Hells I

Always

Needed.

How did the burrito taste?

What played in the background on the TV?

I can't say, but you remember.

The point is,

You grabbed my hand after the burritos and ran back to Thurston

Moore's class,

All the while telling me

About your LSD trip

on The Fourth of July.

The point is,
 That night you let me paint my amber eye shadow on you for the full
 moon reading
 Where you recited three poems
 About Swedish politicians
 And their Gypsy slurs.

The point is,
 You played me some really awful rap from your SoundCloud account
 on the walk home,
 Translated the music when I asked,
 And you didn't leave a word out.
 Well, I don't think you did.

The point is,
 You asked me to come with you when you flew home.
 I received a message on Facebook a month later with an acrostic of
 your own
 Because you said, "I didn't forget."

Goodbye, Jonathan.
 I want you to know,
 The point is you never stopped thinking
 While I never stopped thinking about you

THOUGHTS FROM YOUR PRIVILEGED GIRLFRIEND

MEG DENNY

Tried to shake out my thoughts as if
forgetting is so kind as to
visit us but

we can't stop remembering in this age of Facebook and
I saw it, another trans woman murdered yesterday. Keisha Jenkins,
she loved art and

You
have
to
guard
yourself.

I remember you soaking in the bathtub as if
drinking wine ever helped like you
felt safe but

I went to that Greek party when you couldn't and
I was never scared to live when the Confederate flag flew and

You
often
almost
died.

This story is about the time I worked as a telemarketer.

Just finished a phone call, an update—

"Are you aware of the state's newest insurance policy?"

I placed my headset around my neck, wished

a pillow would grow out of it for the rest of the day, wished

I could work at home in garden, remembered the daisies.

Then came break time.

I pushed myself out of the chair as if

every worker's sadness rested on my shoulders and

went to walk that off but

choked. Fell back.

The headset around my neck was my almost executor.

We fought each other and

I remember thinking fuck you,

I remember breathing heavily,

I remember the wrestled-off wire falling to the floor and then

I just walked off.

See ya.

I recounted the event to you hours later.

"I almost died," I said all nonchalant.

But you sat there for a while and responded,

"M,

my entire *life* is that moment."

I thought how mundane.

But it's not, really.

You can never pull the wire off.

BOUND

JACQUELINE JORDAN

Lost in the wires; a forgotten past
Can't keep up, you're moving way too fast
Applying the pressure, going way too deep
Up all night, using you, losing sleep
You crashed a year a later and what did I become?
A heart broken in two because our souls became one
Intertwined in your existence, becoming way too dependent
I put all of my trust in you
Snapshots of life, stored in your brain
Empty photo albums, still empty, isn't it a shame?
I hold you in my hands, even closer to my heart
Running to you for answers
When did you become so smart?
As I grow older, my desire to learn is replaced
Built with new features, an interchangeable face
I'd be lost without you, if they took you away
This Earth couldn't bear it, if you were gone for one day

HAPPY

SHUNDRIKA SMITH

Aren't we happy
flat ironin' our hair
to be less nappy?

Aren't we happy
twarkin' in the rain
to gain a name?

Aren't we happy
smilin' in his way
tryin' to make him stay?

Aren't we happy
losin' our faith
embracin' the pain?

We are happy,
Aren't we?



PROSE

3RD PLACE

418 SLACK STREET

MADELYN BRYAN

In the spring of 1952, 418 Slack Street was built. I had watched its progress all year as wood, pipes, paint, brick, and more helped hold together something so beautifully made. One day, the house was officially completed. Builders stopped coming, and the neighborhood seemed empty except for that new white house, so I decided to invite myself in. I walked up the three concrete steps leading towards the front door, sensing they would show me something I would not soon forget. I stood on the front porch for some time. The smell of fresh white paint and soft green grass was pungent. Once I opened the door, saw dust spun through the air like wandering bees searching for flowers. I stepped inside and saw nothing but floors and walls. Each room brought a new feeling as I crept throughout the house. No family had yet defiled it with spills and cheap wallpaper. The chimney had not yet been used. The lights lacked a purpose for now. My steps echoed along the grooves of the wooden floor and disappeared down those concrete steps out front until there was nothingness. The silence of the new house was music of

its own. There was purity about the house which I had seemed to have bothered. I realized as I stood in the desolate living room that I could not disturb 418 Slack Street a moment longer.

Though I admired the white house, I had not had the courage to disrupt it again. The summer, however, brought the house more courageous friends and family. The door handle seemed to turn itself open as any welcoming host would. People came in and out, bringing celebration and happiness up and down the concrete steps. I could only dream to invite myself in as a guest again. The silent song of the house was replaced. Real music filled the air, rather than the mixed tempo of my footsteps that had walked along the floor that one spring day. Light was always on now, giving the house a new life. Festive occasions brought the home joy. I could tell for I felt as if I knew the home better than anyone. Year after year, pumpkins smiled on the porch as the house granted candy to all who took the time to stop.

Green and red lights illuminated along the roof, helping Santa find his way to its chimney from the sky. Although the home believed its appearance was bettered with decorations, I knew its original purity was better. Nonetheless, the house seemed happy, and I was happy as well. The house had now become a home.

Many years had passed. Many families had come and gone from the white house on Slack Street. I alone was the home's only constant friend, including the night the last family left. For months there was fighting and yelling and tears. I waited. That autumn, I watched as a mother with two children left down the concrete steps. Car doors slammed as suitcases were thrown in the trunk, and they never looked back at the house which had once protected and sheltered them. The front door stayed cracked open as if begging not to be left alone. It pleaded for someone to enter and make it whole again. The home's only visitors were movers. They took furniture and boxes. They took everything the home had ever owned, shut the door, and left the house alone. For the first time in a long time, the home became a house again. It invited me in for comfort once

again. It was not until I had walked towards the house that I noticed how sad it appeared. The grass was dead. The majority of the white paint had chipped off, revealing the now fragile wooden structure. I walked up the three concrete steps towards the door. I tried to turn the knob, but had to jiggle it a bit before it would let me in this time. The floors had scuffs and stains. The wallpaper curled down in streaks on the wall. Layers of blue, plaid, and floral wallpaper exposed themselves from a multitude of previous owners. The rooms had nail holes where the owners had beaten the walls repeatedly. The only memory left was a cracked picture frame of a family hanging lopsided on the wall. I stood in the living room shocked at the abuse. The house had been through so much, but it forgave twice as much. It forgave, yet I stood in the living room with anger and empathy protruding from me as clearly as my own shadow. With leaving, the owners took memories and happiness. Most importantly, the owners took 418 Slack Street's purity down the three concrete steps.

I had watched the house all these years. I had lived through its experiences. Unfortunately,

no one else saw the beauty in the white house. They came and tore the house apart in the winter of 2015. The door was ripped from its hinges though the house would have gladly let the destroyers in. Slab by slab, it was broken down. Brick by brick went tumbling to the ground. It only took a few days to destroy something once so pure. The house had no strength to fight left. They hauled away the bricks and burned what was left. I sat and realized that the house was happier knowing it did not have to worry about being loved by anyone any longer. After the men were done, I went over to where the house stood to pay my respects. I trampled through the tall, brown grass that had taken over the yard. The crunch sound produced with every step sent shivers down my spine, but I eventually made it to the house's old ground. I stood amazed at what the disrupters left behind.

I climbed up the three concrete steps. Once I reached the third one, I realized that there was nowhere else to go after sixty-three years of wandering. The steps could not lead to anything materialistic. No longer did the steps lead to celebration and festivities. No longer did the steps take away the house's memories, friends, and possessions. The steps lead to something greater because there was no visible threshold. There was no longer a door to walk into, but a universe. As I stood on the steps, I could walk into a happiness I had never known. I could walk into opportunities. I believe I could have walked into Heaven if I tried hard enough. I no longer saw a place where a white house once stood as I looked from beyond the steps. I saw something greater than myself which I had to keep climbing to discover. 418 Slack Street held much more than a white house.

SUMMER HAZE

RALEY PELLITTIERI

If I have to choose a time to die, I would choose to die in the summertime. Most people would consider this thought to be quite morbid for a twelve-year-old girl growing up in the nineties, but I find this thought quite comforting. Nothing makes me happier than the feeling of warm rays shining on my skin and the smell of chlorinated water stained in my hair. Although I have no intention of dying anytime soon, at twelve, I can think of no happier way to leave the world than with burned skin and bleached hair.

The summer heat beats down on my exposed shoulders as I immortalize my words within my journal. I can feel the sunburn starting to form as my skin begins to tingle with redness. Sweat drips from my upper lip into my mouth. It tastes salty, like French fries. My hand reaches up to my left shoulder and traces the hot edges of the red rash. Ouch! My finger touches too close to the purplish black skin bordering the sunburn. I anxiously await the coming days until the tender bruised skin will redden and then tan.

Over the last three years, I have grown accustomed to this rainbow process placed upon my skin. The day I realized the sun's magic still sometimes echoes through my mind, pulling up memories of when my stepfather first revealed his true colors to me.

The summer had just begun, and Mama and my stepfather, Mr. Frank, had been away on their honeymoon for the past two weeks. I was sitting outside on the porch when I heard Mr. Frank's old beaten-up Chevy roar into the driveway. I felt an impulse to jump up and run out to the car, but the threats and curses I heard from inside the vehicle cautioned me to do otherwise.

The front passenger door opened, and Mama jumped out.

"This conversation is over. You hear me, Frank? Over!" she yelled. She turned towards the house and saw me staring at her. She forced a smile and wiped her eyes, trying to hide from me the scene I had just witnessed. I had not seen Mama's eyes this

red and puffy since the night she found out my father had been shot and killed overseas almost eight years ago.

"Mama," I mumbled.

"Everything's fine, Lucy," she said. "Please go inside and find Granny."

"She's just asleep on the couch," I told her.

"Lucy..." Mama said in a cautious tone.

"Yes, ma'am," I replied, standing up. As I turned to walk inside, I heard Mr. Frank's door open with a loud creak. I froze in fear as my eyes caught sight of Mr. Frank's face. Three long red lines were scratched across it. Mama began to cry again as my eyes darted to her and then to Mr. Frank again.

"Go inside, kid," Mr. Frank growled. His words were lost to me as I remained fixated in awe on his face. Millions of thoughts were bubbling in my head. "Now, kid!" I faintly heard Mr. Frank say, but I still did not move.

"Mama?" I mumbled, searching for an answer to the mysterious scrape.

Mama shyly looked away. I noticed the bruise on the side of her pale face. I knew Mama was not much of a fighter. At least, she wasn't one until she was provoked. I didn't need to ask what had happened. The pieces clicked into place. I was scared for Mama because the man I now had to call my father was a monster.

"Lucy, go inside now!" Mama demanded.

I nodded and turned to do as she wanted.

"See, she knows how to listen to orders, Elizabeth. Why don't you?" Mr. Frank asked.

I halted in place. I drew in a deep breath and courageously turned around to face my stepfather.

"What did you just say?" I asked him.

Mr. Frank rolled his eyes and slammed his car door shut. He advanced toward me. I gulped as a walnut-sized lump formed in my throat. I stumbled back three steps.

"That's what I thought, Lucy," he said.

"Don't touch her," Mama begged.

"I'm not gonna touch her," Mr. Frank assured. "I may teach her a lesson about getting into adults' business, though."

When he was standing two steps from me, he stopped.

"Put out your hand," he commanded.

I shook my head as his threatening words pierced my ears. The thought of having a matching bruise to my mother flashed before my eyes.

"Put out your hand," he repeated. His tone was angrier this time, and the spook of his words caused me to jump. I could feel a bit of pee trickle down my leg.

"Do not touch my daughter, or I will never touch you again," Mama spat.

"I am teaching her a lesson," he insisted.

I threw my hands over my ears as the two cursed back and forth. I tried my best not to listen, but mumbles of "shit", "f-you", and "go to hell" leached into my ears.

"Damn you, Frank. Just stop acting like you're the boss!" Mama yelled.

Mr. Frank mumbled inaudible words under his breath, but he dropped the argument. Or so I thought.

As my mom turned to go towards the house, Mr. Frank smacked me on the side of the head, and then covered my mouth.

"Don't you dare tell your mother I hit you," he hissed into my ear.

The next morning, I saw in the mirror the purple welt that had formed on my face. It remained there for two weeks, but Mama never said a word about it. She acted like she didn't even know it was there. It hurt me to think she could ignore my pain, but I feared Mr. Frank would hit me again, so I never brought it up to her.

Since that first incident, my stepfather has been the instigator of many more bruises on my body, but my mother ignores my purple pain each time. I see her bruises that match my own, but she never acknowledges them and keeps them well hid with layers of makeup and long-sleeve clothes.

An engine's roar nears in the distance, waking me up from my thoughts and pulling me back into reality. My stepfather's Chevy truck pulls into the driveway, and he jumps out with a heavy plop. I shyly stand up and shove my notebook and pen into my Lisa Frank knapsack as quick as I can.

"Lucy Green, what the hell are you doing?" my stepfather asks in a low-muffled voice. A cigarette hangs from between his lips, which causes his words to form around a puff of smoke.

"I'm just enjoying the weather. Is that against the rules now too?" I ask him, referring to the constant rules that he says I break.

He scowls, "You know damn well what I'm asking you. I will give you one more chance, and you best answer this correctly, little girl."

I bite back the urge to mouth off, knowing it will result in more pain.

Only six more years, I think to myself. I pray I can make it till then.

Mr. Frank laughs as I realize my hands are now folded.

"Praying won't help you, Lucy," he says.

I smell the scent of alcohol in his breath and leached in his clothes. His eyes are red, and his clothes smell of weed.

"You might as well give up. You have no hope in this world as long as I control you and your mama's lives. You both are worthless pieces of shit that your Daddy left in this world. I bet he'd be glad that he doesn't have to deal with you two measly little bitches anymore," he smirked.

Tears flow from my eyes as my stepfather shatters the image I have of my father in my heart. What kind of monster is this man who is trying to hurt me so bad that he would bring up my deceased dad?

The front door opens with a loud thud, and Mama storms out. Her eyes are bloodshot in rage. She stomps toward Mr. Frank. He continues to smirk.

"Elizabeth, I suggest you go back inside," he says.

"What the hell, Frank," she cries. "What the hell!"

As Mr. Frank reaches over to pick up the rake, I stumble back.

"Mama, no!" I yell.

"Lucy, go inside!" Mama yells back.

I do not know what to do. If I go back inside, Mama will get hurt. If I don't, I may get hurt. Mama's swollen ankle peeks out from under her skirt. I feel something rise in me from the pit of my stomach. For the first time in a while, Mama is defending me. I have to defend her. We're all each other has.

"Don't touch my mama!" I yell, running toward Mr. Frank.

Mr. Frank laughs as he swings the rake toward my head. I scream in pain.

My eyes open to a burning light. I sit up and look around and notice Mama standing by the bright light. Heat radiates toward me from the bright fire beside Mama. She turns away from Mr. Frank's Chevy truck.

"Lucy, you're awake," she cries as she runs toward me.

"Mama, what happened? Where's Mr. Frank?" I ask.

Mama leans down and hugs me.

"Don't worry about that, baby," she says. "He won't bother us ever again."

I want to ask her where he is, but I know better than to ask. The smell of burning flesh stains the air. A chill runs down my back. I do not want to know what happened while I was knocked out. As long as I live, I do not want to know because it doesn't matter. He is gone forever, which is a good enough answer for me.

I hear a siren in the distance. Mama smiles at me. She is no longer afraid; nor am I. I know everything will be okay. I no longer have the desire to die with burned skin and bleached hair. I sigh as I watch the summer haze rise from the burning truck.

HONORABLE MENTION

PARDON MY ACCENT

RICARDO VENTURA

I was just lying down on a seat in the airplane, with about ten minutes left before takeoff. I was there, with my favorite blue-white-blue shirt, covered in sweat, with my phone full of Beatles music, my Bible and two Christian books inside my backpack. What was going on? The migration process had taken longer than I had expected. I was late—as always—and I had six hours left inside a huge structure of metal that would fly from one part of the continent to another. Memories flashed through my mind of the things that had happened ten minutes ago, that I just couldn't believe yet.

I was leaving behind my family, my friends, my local church, my instruments, my achievements, and everything that I was supposed to achieve. I was heading out from my country, Honduras, which is approximately the size of the state of Louisiana, to the well-known United States of America to begin a new life. A

month ago, I was still wondering what courses of my medicine degree I was going to take. Now I was on my way to an unknown country, with unknown people and an unknown culture, to take a shot on my dream—become a successful musician. All I knew so far was that I was going to sleep on somebody else's couch. This meant I needed to find a place to live, get a bed, and buy food and clothes.

I grew up in an environment where I never lacked anything, but there were no leftovers either. My parents made huge efforts to provide a good education for me, the last of four children. I never had much, but I was happy with what I had. I never asked for anything that I did not need, and if I could find my own way to get something without bothering them, I would do it. That included working sometimes, getting part-time jobs, and doing people favors.

As a kid, I always wanted to be a doctor when I grew up, and up until this point, it was what I was working towards. I learned to read using medicine books as a young child. I was a very active kid. I would read books, write stories and poems, draw, paint, and even dance; but I guess young adulthood and society took all of those things away from me. Once, I spoke with my mom about these things, who I was and who I wanted to be, and she said to me, "Changing is part of life, the discernment of how you change is what you gain through years, but deep down at the core of our being we are still the same. The difference of who you were, who you are, and who you want to be, is what you do." That is why I was on that plane, I suppose.

I flew from San Pedro Sula, Honduras, to Atlanta, Georgia, then to Shreveport, Louisiana. My layover in Atlanta was an interesting ordeal; it was a huge airport. All kinds of people, from countries all around the world,

dressed in all kinds of ways, but doing the same thing. Just waiting to leave. When I left San Pedro Sula, it was about 40°C or 104°F. It was hot and humid, but I was used to it. When I arrived in Shreveport, it was winter and 23°F outside. I was trembling like never before, wearing a sweater that was basically an ornament because it was not keeping me warm at all. I could barely feel my hands, nose, or lips, and I could see the steam from my breath when I spoke. I was regretting it already. I missed the warm and tropical weather of my city, but I chose to be here.

A couple of weeks later, I am already in school, walking through this huge but nice campus. Some buildings look really old, but they are not. That is just how they were built, to look "classic," I guess. There was a big transition from being in the hallway to being inside the classroom. In the hallway nobody cared who I was, people would just keep walking while texting, listening to music, playing, but every single one of them with phone in hand.

When I was inside the classroom, people would be staring at me, analyzing me from head to toe and then whispering. What they said? I had no idea. At that time I could barely understand their language or their culture, more specifically the culture of college students. I did understand one word; they said "Mexican." Ha! I guess everything that I heard about stereotypes in this country was true. Whatever the case, I will not judge, or I would be like them.

Most of the people that were nice to me were adults, some of them teachers or janitors. I was too shy to talk to other students, but they would not talk to me either. I started speaking to people slowly, hoping they would understand me through

my thick accent. I was not expecting everyone to be nice, but I made friends among the CAPA kids. I would have regular conversations with friends, but there are just some topics that we can never have in common, like our childhood experiences, or our pasts in general. I would not be able to contribute to those conversations. Our backgrounds are just too different – this still happens. The rest of the people do not understand me, and, honestly, I do not expect them to understand. I am just different, what I eat, what I listen to, what I say, what I feel, what I laugh about, the way I walk, my language, and even my skin color, but I guess that is why they call me a "foreigner."- Even though it is in my own mind, they are all foreigners too.

PURGATORY OF THE DEVOUT

SHUNDRIKA SMITH

"I'm so sorry for your loss." The black masses murmur to the space around my eyes, unable to face my blankness.

Fuck your meaningless platitudes. I nod my head in acceptance to complete the ritualistic exchange.

"She was truly special, such an angel."

She had Satan in her smile. Chanel No.4 clogs my nostrils as black-laced arms engulf me in a tentative embrace. Even now, they are still wary of my otherness.

"We will miss her kind heart."

She wanted to escape the mundaneness of her life. I decide not to crush their views. I'm not sure if they would be able to comprehend the truth, the real Adison Lorraine Hughes.

I drift through the crowd unable to deal with the wailing of hangers-on, gossips, and the misguided. Dressed entirely in white, my ebony skin gleams with sweat,

even as I seek the sanctuary of the nearby beach. I crave the solitude of waves after enduring the funeral service and burial.

Sidestepping Addie's obnoxious cousins, I give a slight chuckle at the irony. Adison's ivory world wore ebony costumes today. I imagine she's cackling hysterically. The reversal of perspective was noticed by everyone as soon as I had entered St. Peter's Catholic Church with my bejeweled dreadlocks flowing freely down my white formal jumpsuit. Even the momentary joy of that memory fades.

My best friend killed herself. The wind hugs my face, and I can smell rain on the fading horizon. Kicking off my pumps, I sink my toes in the sand, and I remember my dear friend.

She cut Joseph's hair in the third grade because he called me a coon.

She hugged me in the girl's bathroom after I told her my father beat me.

She let me sleep at her house when momma had special friends over.

She laughed with me. She cried with me. We spoke of our dreams.

She told me about her life. I told her about mine.

She craved wildness. The undefined. The weird. The taboo. The mystical.

She was my first kiss.

She was my life.

And then she slit her wrists on a Tuesday morning.

The sky weeps with me as if it knows my pain. My chest hurts, and it feels as if my heart is splintering. Was her life so terrible? I thought I knew her. I thought I was the only person she let inside her mind. She was real with me. She hated her blonde hair. She wanted to become a doctor instead of a teacher. She hated ballet. She loved indie music. She wanted to travel the world, taste new food, experience life.

I guess I was wrong.

"God has called one of his children home."

I heard this phrase so many times today. How did they know if Adison walked with God? Even if I didn't know her as well as I thought, it was still more than her parents, her cousins, her priest, her classmates.

She wasn't a saint. She could be a malicious bitch. But, the outsiders, they only saw her surface of kindness and her innocent eyes.

Why did she leave me behind?

The wind whips my dreads into a frenzy, and I tilt my head towards the storm. My tears mix with the rain, and the pain lessens a bit.

I see her face in the waves. Her eyes glimmer with mischief.

I smile in recognition.

She is beckoning me home.

As Adison brushes the water from my face, I hear a scream, but I don't care.

I'm with my Adison again.

A TIME I KNEW YOU DIFFERENTLY

CHARLES MAC HAMILTON

The day you came back, we spent the afternoon driving in the country looking for wildflowers. The trees had just barely turned young again, and you remarked that they looked older than you had remembered. I said that we both looked older, but that it was probably good.

I remember thinking that the voices that once cried out for sex and steam were now content to just seize the day. I mentioned that those voices now haunted me. And then, the clouds turned gray, and then white, and then back to blended blue. We reminisced about Provence and Torri Del Benaco and Lausanne. You asked if I wanted you to drive, but I never knew if that's what you wanted. You wouldn't have told me anyway.

You told me that you were scared, and I reminded you that you had always been afraid of one thing or another. "Yes," you

said, "I do remember that. But I don't remember when it started, or why, or of what."

I did. I did indeed. It was the familiarity with life; with my body, me with yours—that frightened you. And that I knew the meaning of words that you didn't—you were shocked at how many words lived and breathed. You said they strangled and suffocated you and died with us.

"You're still smoking," I kind of said and kind of asked. "I had to give them up, and like you, I hated to see them go away from my lips. I know, that sounds impertinent— a word that flushes me— but you, your mouth, and your breasts were once fresh and saucy. Or at least that's the way I saw you, and then, the way I tasted you."

There had been a time when we tried to tell each other the unthinkable and unnameables:

my letting a whore with a French name gorge on me once in New York, and my youthful days of writing bad checks. You telling me that you peed in the parking lot after The Who concert in '73 and that the best sex you ever had was with men you didn't love. Ha! And that surprised us?

Then we smoked many, many cigarettes after I watched you swim naked, floating on your back, your golden triangle waving at me, shimmering through the sizzling Florida moonlight and spiced, undulating ripples.

That as we looked into the cracks of each other where we never allowed anyone else to enter—that scared you too. Yes, it even scared me.

You never had enough money. And there was never enough of enough. When the pantry was bare, like these trees are now, it scared you. Maybe that's why you're scared right now. That elm over there, empty of its leaves. See? The emptiness reminds you of it.

When I said that, we both turned and looked behind us. There was so much to see and every speck became clearer, even the ones that were far, very far away. It made us feel older. But then you said that it was probably good.

"You know you scared me," I heard you say. "I used to be so hungry for you; for it, and for it with you, and then you scared me."

Remember how I argued with you? "But you were the one who wanted to go get more wine after the party broke up. And then you wanted to make love wildly and repeatedly. You were drinking it all in, you couldn't get enough of any of it."

But when you thought I was trying to read your mind, even though I wasn't, that scared you the most.

"We will have to change the subject," you said.

And I agreed that these soured

grapes were no longer to be considered as something fruitful. I surrendered, and then just wanted to imbibe you again as I did when you poured yourself out onto my younger face.

I turned the car around and started back to where I was now living—without you—entering then into a warm winter's whiteness; not unlike the gleam of the toothpaste we had once bought together at the Dollar Store in Port Orange.

Then we went to P.J.'s and drank tequila shots while we watched the fish go round above us, in hot aluminum pipes. You fell in love with the one that was garnished with stripes and a yellow belly, did you not?

"You do know that we are slowly dying, don't you?" I kind of said it and kind of asked it. "Do you

think that's bad, getting older?"

You turned away from me and looked into the fields of deer and said, "Yes."

I said that I thought it was probably good.

"I may have to leave soon," I then suggested. "I've been getting an unpleasant and saddened lump in my throat lately. My mind runs amok with wonder and wander. There is lust of some kind, but I'm not sure if I should be scared or not. If I were to ever touch you again, would you rather me do it with my words or embrace you with my arms?"

"I don't know if this will be good," you kind of asked and you kind of said.

"I'm as if an unrepentant candle," I confessed.

A BRIEF EXISTENCE

NICOLAS FRY

There was something blissful about the glow of the cigarette's cherry against the pitch-black of the room. As if that slow orange pulse was but only the last fading light in a sea of darkness. Ah, but it was just a dark, lonely night as I pulled in another drag of acrid smoke. The warmth almost welcomed by my lungs. Nights like these were rare these days. All of the stress, struggling to make it by, nothing really compared to the simplistic moment of being able to relax for once. Somewhere in the distance there was a brief groan. Probably someone else in the house. I didn't care, it was my personal space. My escape. Just me and my dirty little habit. I could only reflect on what in my life had led to this moment.

Was it that I had been a terrible person in days past? Sure, maybe I had done a few questionable things and lied to people, but how could that compare?

Granted, this had all led to me doing more harm to others than I could have ever imagined. How easily we forget that our actions can bring down just about anyone in one way or another. Maybe this was the hell I deserved. I could hear the slow dragging steps of someone outside my door now. Another puff of smoke escaped my lips. It was so strange to see how my eyes were adjusting back and forth. Yet isn't that all life is? Constant shifts of focus, nothing ever really seeming to stick around forever. Did my emotional estrangement drive everyone away from me? Probably.

When everything just went to hell, I had a few loved ones around me. I tossed them to the wind, fracturing old bonds, tearing away blood ties, and just vacating a dying world. It's not like I had a choice because the entire world was shrieking for mercy at one grand moment of true despair. How cynical I was to

think that I was only responsible for myself at the time. Now they, those that I held dear, were all gone. The ones who told me they loved me were no longer nearby to alleviate the pain I was surrounded in. My fingers pressed to my lips while my other arm rested between my head and the pillow. I was comfortable in the bed, which is a solace I believed so very few people considered a luxury. Be it alone or shared, a bed is like a floating island. The only island anyone can own and be lifted away into dreams of better days. Yet, after tonight, I would no longer dream. The shuffling came to a halt outside my door and a tiny tap, tap, tap sounded off into the silence of the room.

A glance sideways revealed a door that was nothing more than a dark-grey silhouette that interrupted my thoughts for a moment. I had no time for anyone at this point. Truly, I had never had time for anyone in the past, it was all just about me. Me, me, me, me. God, what kind of person must I have been?

Nothing I did back then seemed to actually matter in the scheme of things. I was, and am, nothing more than a singular number out of something close to seven billion people. Someone else out there had to feel the way I did. No one was there, though. It was always just me, a cigarette, and the gun that lay upon the end table next to the bed. I could hear the shuffling begin again but it began to fade away from the door.

"That's right, piss off." My whisper bounced around the walls and echoed back into my ears. A life reviewed had turned into a life so wretched. There was a single thud against the door that time. Whoever was out there had struck the door hard enough to make it vibrate for a second. I could not have cared less about who or what came in. Ash tumbled down onto my chest. This cigarette was about halfway gone, and perhaps so was I. For some reason, I couldn't imagine a single happy moment outside of my childhood. Did anything after that ignorance count?

Any measurement of happiness seemed to be outshadowed by all the loss I felt inside. Happiness is but a fleeting emotion based on the inability to see the world for what it is. The world was a hell-hole, one determined to devour everything I ever cared about.

A pair of thuds and some more shuffling could be heard outside my room now. They were getting closer. Who were they? Demons coming to cart me off from this level of hell to the next. So be it. This time I was not afraid to lose, this time I was not here for myself. The cigarette was almost gone by now, and I was soon to join it. If life was so bad, if everything I did was so disgraceful and damning of me, then I had decided I would go out on my own terms. Gun in hand, I stood up from the bed. The thuds on the door increased in strength and number. Rhythmic beats reaching a crescendo just as determination coursed through my veins. If I had anything left, I

would have left it with a smile.

I tore the door open. Metal barked in my hands as it spewed brilliant flashes and lead. Flesh and blood covered the walls, and a sea of bodies compressed themselves against me. My burnt-out cigarette fell to the floor to be crushed under rotted feet. I felt teeth sink into my neck, my arm, my sides, but none of it mattered. I felt no pain, just a slight head rush, and maybe some light insanity. If I had a last thought, I guess it would have been the smiling faces of my friends and family. I think I had been smiling when I knew my end stared me in the face. Death held her arms wide for me, her sweet, loving embrace. One solid movement of my free hand and the gun was pressed to my temple as my body became a feast to the undead around me. Mom, Dad, I'm finally coming home. Click, goes the hammer on its way back. Good night, and good luck.



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